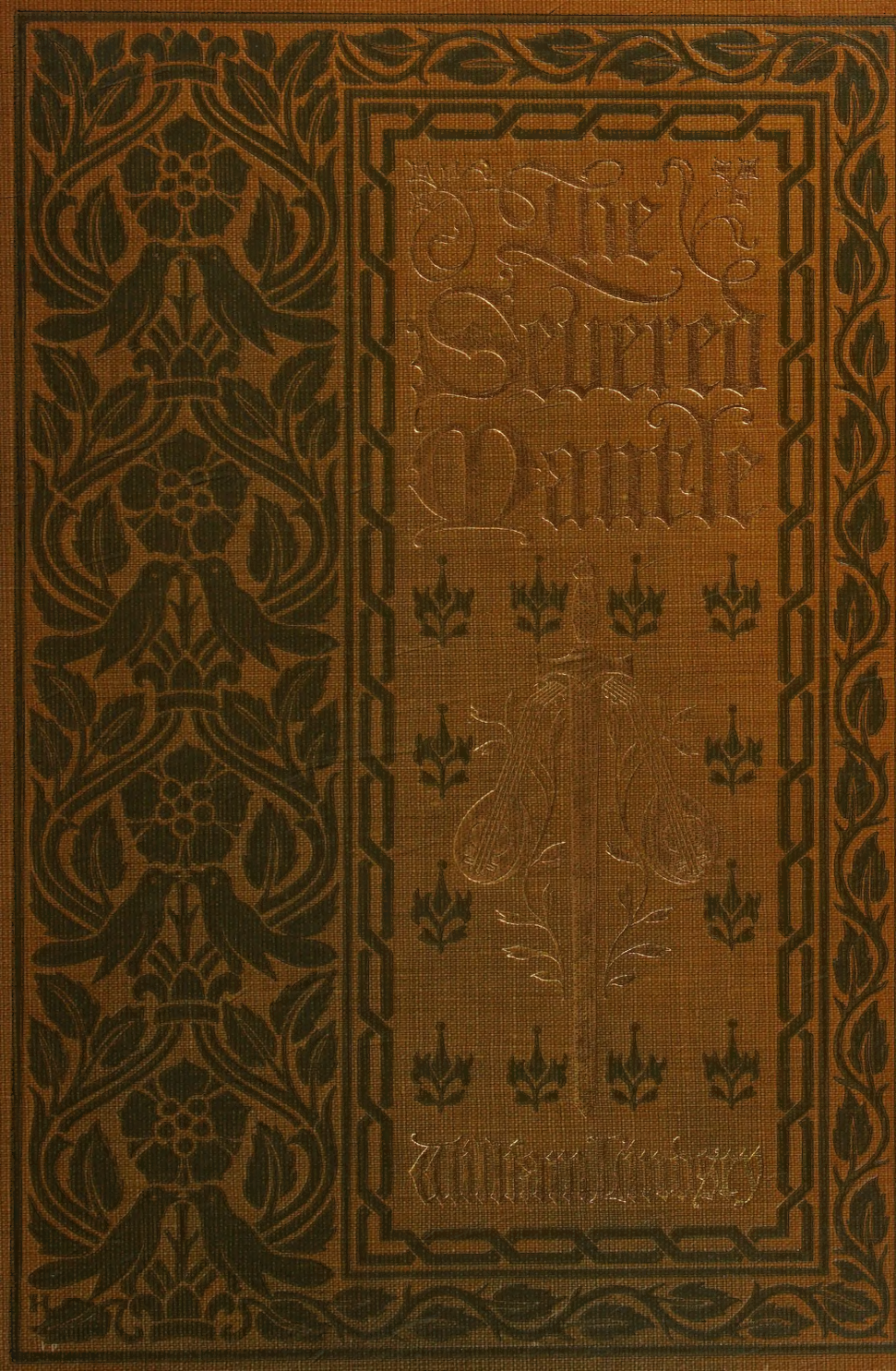
Die
Burenband

Mrs. E. H. Harriman
with the sincere respects
of the
Author
Dec. 17/1909

THE SEVERED MANTLE

(Page 30)

RAIMBAUT MOUNTED THE STEPS AS A VOICE STARTED UP IN SONG

THE SEVERED MANTLE

BY

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WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY
ARTHUR I. KELLER

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THIRD IMPRESSION

To My Friend
Thérèse Roumanille
(*Madame Boissière*)
Daughter of a Provençal Poet
Queen of the Félibres

FOREWORD

In this book I have tried to picture Provence in the time of the troubadours. I show the "land of the nightingale and rose" when Idealism reigned supreme, with Love, Joy, and Song her counsellors. Here love first ceased to mean passion, and homage of woman grew to be a religion; the joy of life was over all, and song the natural expression of every feeling.

At the very heart of it there was a great earnestness, but it was the fervor of children — children who had lofty dreams to which they could not climb. They believed that love should come to youth as the hawthorn bud to springtime, — not desire, but devotion which asked little, and found contentment in itself. No matter how strong the love or how inspired the song, it must be always controlled by "mesura." This was no less their creed, though the most devout broke the chains which held them — for the world was young.

I have chosen to write with a simplicity which is not always warm and brilliant, because this manner best expresses the spirit of the time. The book is not a tale of adventure, though perils are experienced; nor is it a historical novel, though its characters breathed the soft air of Provence in the latter half of the Twelfth Century. In contradiction

of the common belief that the troubadour was a shallow fellow who wandered about twanging a lute, and singing pretty songs to foolish women, I hope I have shown how very earnest was the life, and how lofty were the dreams which often led him to the shadow of the cloister, or to death on the hot sands of Palestine. The flower may seem exotic to us whose lives are so practical and so complex, yet we may learn something from those who thought first of Love and Joy and Song.

W. L.

Boston, May 1, 1909.

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THE SEVERED MANTLE

CHAPTER I

VALOR AND JOY

It was dawn of a May morning in Provence. The dew was on the grass, the hedges were abloom, and the sun shone a ruddy disk on the rim of a cloudless sky. Every hill-top was red; here and there the valleys glistened with sunbeams streaming through the gaps in the mountains. The wind was buoyant with the joy of life and fragrant with the breath of almond blossoms.

Only the village of Vacqueiras resisted the charm of the springtime, crouching dark and sullen under the shadow of the bleak crags. The tower of its castle was crowned with a dazzling halo, but in the courtyard of the grim fortalice the shades of night still lingered, the high walls shutting out the day as if it were an enemy. The little quadrangle was cold and damp and empty, save for a bare-legged lad who stood before the entrance of the tower. His clothes were covered with the dust of the mill, and his freckled face was white with the powdered wheat. He held a willow basket in his hand, upon which a lean hound gazed no less longingly than his master looked at the open door.

Suddenly there was the sound of quick footsteps on the stairs. The boy's face brightened, and his mouth widened into a broad smile, revealing the loss of two front teeth. He gave a shrill cry of greeting as a young lad appeared in the archway, clad in a worn crimson suit, with a belt of russet leather from which hung a short dagger. He had the square shoulders of a man-at-arms, and a face like that of the Saint John on the walls of the cathedral at Avignon. With a voice in which there was mingled friendship and authority, he asked, —

"Well, Jacques, is everything ready?"

"Everything," replied the miller's lad. "We could walk to Avignon and back with the provender in this basket. Best of all, Michonne has given us some sweet cakes fresh from the oven. Shall we eat them now while they are hot, so as to be strong for our journey?"

"Indeed, no," answered Raimbaut, firmly, as he tightened his belt and swung his short dagger so that it rested on the back of his thigh; "not a single crumb do we touch till we reach the grove at the foot of the Devil's Tooth."

"The Devil's Tooth!" exclaimed Jacques. "Why have you chosen a place so distant? It is a weary climb."

"I cannot give my reasons now," replied Raimbaut. He paused for a moment to pat Cerberus' lean ribs, then led the way out of the shadows of the

courtyard, with Jacques at his elbow and the hound following, his nose close to the basket.

There was no one in the square but old blind Havoise, who sat on the steps of the church holding some wax tapers which she hoped to sell to pious worshippers. As Raimbaut hurried by he caught sight of her, and, taking one of the cakes from the basket, he first held it under the old woman's nose that she might smell of it, and then placed it in her trembling hand.

Pursued by a volley of blessings from Havoise, the boys swung gaily out of the village gate, singing Duke Guilhem's crusader song at the top of their voices, —

> "Valor and joy have filled my heart,
> But here the road of Life must part;
> Now on the heavenly quest I start
> And I shall rest me by and by."

The air was like wine. The hedge-rows sparkled in the sunlight, and the fragrance of the fields was all about them. They were drunk with the joy of living, and their veins full of the spring madness. As they breasted the hill, they could see the Devil's Tooth showing tall and sinister against the blue sky. It was an isolated fragment of rock, rising sheer and steep from the hillside, so like a discolored tusk that it was easy to see how it had earned its title from the imaginative peasants. It seemed not far away; but when the boys had climbed until their legs rebelled, it still rose far above them.

They threw themselves, panting, on a little stretch of brown grass which grew between the rocks, Cerberus making wide circuits around them in pursuit of a visionary quarry. There was nothing near them on the barren hillside but an occasional sparrow twittering among the rocks, and a lark mounting higher and higher, until only its song remained.

Beneath them lay the village, a jumble of crooked roofs and winding alleys, dominated by the church and castle. It had no wall, for the frugal peasants had joined house to house in an unbroken chain running from the valley around the crest of the hill and back again to the banks of the brook. Here was the mill with its turning wheel and the white water flashing in the sun. They could see men laboring in the vineyards and olive groves; beyond stretched the wide valley of the Rhone melting into the haze of the distant west.

When they resumed their journey, they came upon a flock of goats feeding on the banks of a brook where the grass grew soft and green. In their midst stood Benizet, the goatherd, tall and gaunt and motionless, his arms folded on his breast. He was clad in a brown robe like that of a monk, girt above his knees, and on his shoulders there rested a goatskin mantle. His head was bare, his red hair bleached by the sun, his face serious and melancholy. He did not smile when Jacques cried out to him, nor answer Raimbaut's greeting; and so they left him, silent and solitary.

All the morning the Devil's Tooth seemed to recede at their approach. It was a full hour after noon when they found themselves in the shadow of the little wood with the bleak rock rising high above their heads. For a time neither of the boys spoke, and even Cerberus was content to lie at their feet with extended tongue and panting sides. The air was fragrant with the odor of the pine branches, and the cool wind blew softly on their hot foreheads.

At last Jacques was aroused by Cerberus, who had his nose fairly in the basket; and after driving the dog away, the miller's lad spread the food on a flat rock, and the boys devoured their luncheon ravenously. When they had finished, they gave the fragments to Cerberus and threw themselves full length on the grass.

Raimbaut was the first to break the silence.

"Shall I tell you why I have come to the Devil's Tooth to-day?"

"Do," answered Jacques, "for I should be glad to know. Faith, we could have eaten our luncheon long ago and not made ourselves footsore and weary."

"It is now five years since my father received his hurt. He was riding home from the tournament at Courthézon at peace with all the world, having neither feud nor quarrel with any man. Yet he was, without warning, struck a traitorous blow which left him helpless. Though I was only a little lad of ten, I can remember as if it were yester-

day when he was brought to the castle by good Bernart, the troubadour. No clue had we to my father's assailant, but a wisp of red roan hair caught in the joints of a gauntlet. This we believe he clutched from the mane of his enemy's destrier, as he was falling to the ground. I then vowed that I would search the whole world until I found the double of this wisp of hair, and every time I draw my sword I plan to become a knight and punish my father's foe. When I am awake, I have no doubts or fears, yet in my sleep strange fancies come to me. Tell me, Jacques, do you ever dream?"

"Sometimes, but I remember nothing in the morning."

"Did you ever dream that you were lying on the edge of a precipice and wake trembling with fright?"

"I believe I have had a vision in which I feared to fall from a great height."

"Again and again," continued Raimbaut, lifting himself on to his elbow and facing Jacques, who now sat upright looking at his master with wondering eyes,—"again and again have I dreamt that I was lying on the top of the Devil's Tooth, and have wakened in a frenzy of fear. I, who plan to be a knight and do brave deeds for the glory of my lady, lie trembling at an unreal danger. My father once told me that we dread the unknown only, and that if we become familiar with it, our fright disappears. Long ago he had a charger who shied and snorted at the big mangonel in the court-

yard. My father spent many minutes in persuading him, but at last the beast put his very nose on the mangonel and cribbed playfully at it with his teeth. This morning I decided I would try to cure myself of my bad dreams by coming here to the Devil's Tooth and climbing to the very top."

"Climb the Devil's Tooth! Why, nothing but wings could take you! Have you forgotten the shepherd lad who fell when he had clambered halfway up the cliff? There are those who say that the boy's spirit wanders through this very grove at nightfall."

"At nightfall!" echoed Raimbaut. "I believe ghosts come in the daytime as well as in the dark, only we cannot see them."

The waving branches sighed and whispered and threw weird shadows. There came a gust of wind that felt like the chill presence of the wandering spirit. Jacques shivered; Cerberus whined and crept closer to him. Even Raimbaut felt the influence of the story, looked uneasily over his shoulder, and began to whistle. Suddenly he grew silent, as there came to his ears the faint tinkle of a silver bell.

"It is a falcon!" shouted Jacques, rushing out into the sunlight, followed by Raimbaut. "It is a 'scaped bird! Do you see the broken jess dangling from its leg?"

"Yes," cried Raimbaut, shading his eyes from the fierce glare as he looked up into the blue sky;

"it is a gerfalcon as white as the dove that flew from the Ark! See! She has a nest in that little tree growing on the rock!"

The boys watched the beautiful bird as she fluttered over her nest and fed her young. She preened her feathers for a little while in the bright sunlight, then spread her wings and in an incredibly short time was out of sight.

"Alas!" said Jacques, "it is a pity she has built her nest where we cannot reach it. It would please your father more than a bag of gold to have the young falcons, if they are like their mother."

"And he shall have them!" declared Raimbaut, earnestly, as he studied the steep cliff with an eager eye.

"You cannot do it!" said Jacques, pleadingly.

"Do you see that narrow ledge?" asked Raimbaut, pointing with his finger. "It starts from the hillside far to the left and mounts higher and higher to the very top."

"I see it plainly," answered Jacques, "but often it narrows and gives a doubtful foothold. There are places where it breaks off altogether. I am sure you will not risk your life on such a quest. Would you, who tremble at dreams, dare so great a danger?"

"If I climb not the cliff to-day, I shall always after be a coward. Neither valor nor joy can come to me. Now I have a double spur: to conquer fear, and win my father's smile. I will climb the rock

by the help of the saints, and in spite of the Devil."

"You shall not go!" cried Jacques, clinging to his master's arm.

"Indeed I will!" replied Raimbaut, breaking from the detaining hand, "and none shall hinder me."

He crossed himself, clambered over the débris of loose stones, and began to climb. The ledge ran diagonally up the face of the cliff, and at the beginning Raimbaut found it as easy as a staircase. In fact, it was little more perilous than the irregular steps which led to his own room in the castle of Vacqueiras. As he mounted higher, however, the ledge narrowed and became a mere line on the face of the cliff. For a moment only he hesitated. Then, clinging to a crevice above his head, he crept slowly along until he reached a place where the ledge was wide and safe again.

Here he paused, for he knew he must husband his strength. He was breathing heavily, and leaned against the cliff for support. The sun was beating fiercely on his bare head, and the lichen-covered rocks were as hot to his hand as a baker's oven. The faint odor of the pine trees floated up to him, and the fragrance of the little plants which grew in the crevices was sweet to his nostrils.

When his strength came back to him, he tightened his belt and started to climb again, his courage rising with every step. He was certain of success,

when he discovered to his dismay that the ledge had fallen away, leaving a wide gap with neither foothold nor hand-hold between. Neither above nor below was there the least crevice or projection. Here, indeed, he needed wings to cross. Courage alone would not avail. Perhaps from this very spot the shepherd lad had fallen! As Raimbaut paused uncertain, he heard a cry from Jacques, thin and faint and ghostly: —

"Come back, my master! I pray you by all that is holy, risk not your life!"

At the sound, he looked down and saw Jacques' white face far below. Up to this time Raimbaut's head had been steady and his eye clear; but now, at the first glance, the height-madness seized him and his brain whirled. His knees trembled, and he clung to the cliff lest he should throw himself down.

For a full minute he struggled against the delirium that threatened, but when he opened his eyes, they were keen and confident. He measured the distance carefully, and saw that the ledge was wide and firm beyond. He forced himself to forget the dreadful chasm, and to imagine that there flowed a shallow brook between the rocks. He stepped back, took a few quick steps, and leaped with all his strength. The thin air against his face seemed to push him back with feeble fingers, and hold him suspended over the yawning gulf. For a moment he balanced uncertain, and then fell forward on his face, clutching fiercely at a little clump of ferns.

He rose quickly to his feet, for with the crossing of the gap there came to him a confidence without a flaw. Higher and higher he climbed, until he found himself underneath the tree and could hear the young falcons chattering above him. There was a sheer wall as high, and almost as smooth, as that of the little church at Vacqueiras. He studied this last obstacle carefully. Then, with clenched teeth, taking advantage of the least crevice, he drew himself painfully to the top and fell almost fainting on the green turf.

His clothes were torn, his shoes in shreds, his fingers cut and bleeding. As he looked about him, it seemed a very Garden of Eden. There were waving grasses, clumps of box and gorse, rosemary, thyme, and lavender, and in a little depression grew a wild rose.

He staggered to his feet and gave a cry of triumph, that Jacques might know he had reached the top in safety. He who trembled at dreams had faced a real danger and conquered. Something spoke in his heart and told him that he could never again be a coward. "Valor and joy" must hereafter be his portion. He had almost forgotten the young falcons, until he was reminded by their shrill chatter that his quest was not yet crowned with success.

The little tree was rooted in a deep fissure, its trunk almost horizontal. In its outer branches was the nest, a ragged framework of rough sticks, in which lay three young falcons nearly ready to fly.

They promised to be pure white, fit for a king's gift. Raimbaut crept out on the trunk of the tree without any thought of danger, and did not notice how perilously it bent under his weight, when, in spite of their cries and menacing beaks, he threw the young birds one after the other out into the air. He was beginning to creep back along the bending tree, when there came a crash, a shower of dust and earth, and he found himself clinging to the branches, dangling over the awful depths.

Again and again the roots cracked, and the tree sank lower and lower until it hung just out of reach of the face of the cliff.

For a few seconds Raimbaut was too stunned to think, and could only clutch instinctively. Then he made a determined effort and drew himself up until his chin was on a level with his hands. He tried to grip with his knees, but the twigs were too slight, and he slowly sank back, supported only by his bleeding fingers. He realized that he could do nothing more for himself than cling to his frail support. In another instant he must drop to the sharp rocks which seemed to wait for him like the teeth of some horrible monster.

Was this to be the end of it all? It was not fair, after he had conquered Fear, to be overcome by treacherous Death. He struggled desperately, but could not lift himself a single inch.

He cried aloud, "Mother, help me!" but there came no answer to his call.

He said a Pater Noster as fast as he could speak the words.

He screamed, "Saint Martin, come to me! Christ, save me!"

Still, there was no response but the hideous echoes from the rocks. At last, with white lips too weak to cry aloud, he whispered, "O Blessed Mary, succor me, and I will serve thee for ever!"

Even the wind was silent. He knew that his hands were loosening on the branch, although all feeling had left them. His fingers were slipping over the rough bark, when he felt himself gripped and drawn upward by some unseen, mighty power. Fear and horror gave way to a blissful certainty of safety, and for a long time he was conscious of nothing else.

When he came to himself, he was lying on his back in the soft grass. Some angel had been sent to rescue him! He opened his eyes expecting to see a celestial vision, but instead, found Benizet looking down into his face. The goatherd was pale as death, his teeth chattered, and he was crossing himself incessantly.

For a little while Raimbaut was content to lie motionless; but at last he made a determined effort and, rising to his knees, found that the goatherd's crook was fast in his belt. He had been hooked like a trout in the brook, and drawn from his perilous position by Benizet's strong arm. Raimbaut was about to speak, but the goatherd silenced him with

uplifted hand, and broke into a prayer of thankfulness, terrifying in its intensity. Again and again he repeated the same prayer, until he was interrupted by Jacques, who came stumbling over the edge of the cliff and embraced Raimbaut, laughing and crying in the same breath.

"Alas, my master!" he sobbed, holding Raimbaut in his arms, and rocking to and fro like a peasant-woman with her babe; "I gave you up for dead, and even now, I cannot believe you safe."

"Oh, Jacques!" said Raimbaut, "I will never doubt the power of prayer again. It is the good saints who have saved my life to-day."

"It is good Saint Benizet, then," replied Jacques, "although I have never seen his name in the calendar."

"To Our Lady should be given all the praise," said Raimbaut, "for it was to her I prayed."

At this Benizet crossed himself, and declared so solemnly that Raimbaut trembled at the words, —

"A life saved by prayer belongs to Christ and His Church."

For a long time Raimbaut lay on his back, wondering at the words of Benizet. When he struggled to his feet, he found himself quite unable to walk even with the assistance of Jacques' shoulder. So Benizet took him on his back and carried him down a steep path which wound among the less precipitous rocks on the eastern side of the cliff.

They found Cerberus following the young falcons frantically over the hillside, but Jacques rescued the birds and placed them, unhurt, in the empty basket. So great was the goatherd's strength that he bore Raimbaut back to the village without pausing to take breath, and Raimbaut walked unaided into the castle and took his place at the table without frightening Michonne. He was too weary to eat, however. All the while Benizet's words were ringing in his ears: "A life saved by prayer belongs to Christ and His Church."

CHAPTER II

SAINT MARTIN'S MANTLE

SHUT in on all sides by high walls, the courtyard of Vacqueiras was the very home of echoes. The slightest sound was magnified, as buxom Michonne could testify, for on one sad day her husband in the tower heard the kiss with which she was saluted by gallant Enric at the door below. It was the "kiss passionate," not the greeting of courtesy, and resulted in the dismissal of Enric from the household, his handsome face disfigured by a gash from lip to eyebrow.

On this May morning, it was not a matter of kisses or of echoes, but sounds strident and clamorous. Raimbaut was engaged in sword-play with old Thibaud. There was the noise of shuffling feet, the sharp ring when blade struck blade, and the loud clang when a blow landed fairly on a helmet.

Looking down with lack-lustre eyes from an embrasure stood Peirol, lord of Vacqueiras. He was a mountain of flesh, black-bearded and sullen-faced, with an expression of vacancy, the sign of a clouded mind. His glance brightened as Thibaud gave ground before Raimbaut's fierce assault, and he turned to the stairs. Yet so slow and laborious was his descent, that when he reached the courtyard, the bout was over and the contestants had

doffed their helmets. Old Thibaud stood leaning on his blunted sword, breathing heavily, but Raimbaut had not turned a hair in the encounter. Seeing his father in the doorway, he hurried to him and said, —

"Let me show you the young falcons I captured yesterday. They are safely caged in the demure, and I have washed and trimmed them."

He spoke with a loud voice, gesticulating freely in his efforts to reach his father's dull brain; and taking the huge hand in his own, he led him over the slippery flags to the cote in the corner.

No sooner had Peirol set eyes upon the young birds than he gave a cry of wonder and admiration.

"Three — white — falcons!" he exclaimed, speaking each word with difficulty. He was not content until he had examined and handled each bird, and seemed more like himself than at any time since he had received his hurt.

When Anselme entered the courtyard, he beckoned the good priest eagerly and said again, "Three — white — falcons!" lifting his hands in amazement, and with an expression of supreme happiness. He was so interested that Raimbaut left him in the care of Thibaud and followed Anselme to his room in the castle, where every morning he was tutored by the priest.

Usually alert, Raimbaut was to-day absent-minded and lethargic. He listened without interest

as Anselme told of Alexander's legendary feats, his escape from the Sirens, and other enchantments no less dangerous. Even the miraculous bath in the fountain which springs from the river of Paradise drew not a single wondering glance; and when the "prophetic trees" were questioned and Alexander learned that he must die in a year and a month, there was not a shadow of sadness on the boy's face. Anselme could not understand what made him so dull and apathetic, yet he was too wise to ask, feeling certain that Raimbaut would in good time unbosom himself.

So the morning dragged on until the hour of noon, when Raimbaut laid aside the scroll on which the map of the world was roughly drawn. He took a lute from the corner and ran his fingers over the strings, playing random melodies and snatches of old songs.

Anselme looked up from the breviary in his lap and said, —

"Let me hear the 'Agnus Dei,' that I may be sure you will not fail me in the choir on Sunday."

Raimbaut struck a few notes of prelude, and then sang the sonorous words without hesitation; for Latin was little less familiar to him than the "langue d'Oc."

When he finished, he changed abruptly to a chanson of Bernart de Ventadorn's beginning, —

"So full of gladness is my heart
The earth itself seems changed!"

The words and the music were full of the joy of springtime, but the song was far from merry as Raimbaut sang it; and ending with a clashing discord, he put the old lute back in its place.

"Tell me," asked Anselme, "which would you rather sing, the music of the Church, or the songs of the troubadours?"

"I like them both," replied Raimbaut, "the 'Agnus Dei' at Mass in the morning, and songs of valor, joy and love for the rest of the day."

"And yet," said the priest, "do you realize how small a part you give to the praise of God, and how much to the pleasures of the world? Do you think the good Lord Christ will be content with so poor a share of your devotion?"

To this question Raimbaut gave no answer, as he looked thoughtfully into Anselme's clear blue eyes. It was only after a long silence that the boy said, —

"I shall not forget my duty to God, to Holy Church, and to my over-lord; my friend I will not desert, and the weak will I protect as becometh a good knight; but I will live first for love, and song, and glory. I would be a troubabour, and not a priest!"

He spoke so decidedly that Anselme realized that he was under the influence of some strong emotion; yet, even now, the priest would not pry into the boy's secret.

"You talk of life as the vine-dresser on the hillside speaks of the sea of which he knows nothing. I

have learned that after every sweet taste there follows the flavor of the bitter almond. The wise man gives not his heart to love, or war, or pleasure; but seeks for peace."

To this Raimbaut made no reply, but looked out over the plain towards Courthézon. For a long time he kept his eyes fixed on the western sky, and when at last he turned to Anselme, he asked, —

"Do you think my father will ever recover from his hurt?"

"That must be as God wills," answered the priest.

"As God wills!" exclaimed Raimbaut. "Is not the good Christ who went about healing the sick willing to restore my father?"

"God alone comprehends what is best for us. We can only pray, and leave the future to Him."

"I cannot juggle with words," exclaimed Raimbaut. "For four long years I have prayed for my father. This morning I received the first sign that my petition was heard."

"Yes," replied Anselme, "Peirol was keenly interested in the birds. I am told that as a falconer he had no equal in all Provence. No nest was safe from him; and when it came to the training of a hawk, he could do more in a single month than most falconers in a whole summer. It was through his skill that he won a place with the Count of Courthézon."

"All this I know right well," replied Raimbaut, "yet it is as a squire that I like to think of him.

Bernart has told me how he won his spurs. While attempting to take a castle in Valence, they were themselves attacked. Greatly outnumbered, it was only through my father's courage that they escaped to their boats on the Rhone. Thither he bore the Count, severely wounded, on his own strong shoulders. I like to picture my father with a red sword in his hand, beating the enemy back until all his comrades were safe. He was the very last to step from shore."

"It was a noble deed," declared Anselme, "and the Count was so grateful for his rescue that he made brave Peirol a knight then and there, despite his lowly origin. For two more years they wandered together on many a merry quest, and then appeared at Vacqueiras, with Michonne seated on a stout palfrey and holding you in her arms. Here with a flourish of trumpets your father was proclaimed Lord of Vacqueiras, holding village and castle in fief for the Count of Courthézon."

"The Count was there, and my father, and I in the arms of Michonne; but where was my mother?" asked Raimbaut.

Little prepared for this abrupt question, Anselme flushed before Raimbaut's searching glance.

"Truly, I know not," said the priest.

"She must have been somewhere, either in heaven or earth. Where has she been all these years? Where is she now?"

"I cannot tell you," answered Anselme.

"But why?" persisted Raimbaut. "Every boy in the village has a mother, and they are only peasant lads. All my life I have been lonely. I have felt the lack of something, I knew not what. Only yesterday did I discover what it was. I climbed the Devil's Tooth and was near to death, hanging over the jagged rocks. My first cry for help was to my mother. Then I called to Our Lady St. Mary, and Benizet was sent to save me. Tell me, good father, what did the goatherd mean when he said, 'A life saved by prayer belongs to Christ and His Church'?"

Anselme, whose relations with Raimbaut were almost as intimate as with his own soul, replied,—

"The life of every man belongs to Christ and to His Church. Preservation from death should but compel a stricter consecration."

"What does that mean?" cried Raimbaut. "Must I be a priest? How am I bound by my vow? All night I dreamed of it, and all the morning have I been troubled by my thoughts. I wish to be a troubadour. I love the joy of life. Yet more I love the beautiful Madonna. Tell me what I must do?"

As he spoke, the boy's face was pale and his lips trembled with emotion. For a long time Anselme made no reply. He was praying silently.

"The noblest life is one of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the service of the Church. Yet this must be of free will and without constraint. You

are too young to choose. No one, not even I who love you so well, can decide for you. We all must listen for the voice of God. To some there comes no command but to live a life of virtue. Others, to save their souls, are bound to leave the world, and flee to a lonely cell in the wilderness. The great thing is willingness to obey."

"I will heed the voice of God, though I love not solitude. I dream of a blissful lady, and seek a Perfect Love."

"Perfect Love is found in Heaven alone. The path to Heaven is paved with sacrifice. To some there comes the Call of the Cross, and brave men part from all they hold dear for death on the sands of Syria."

"I promise to join the Crusaders," declared Raimbaut solemnly, "as soon as my arm is strong enough to wield a sword and level a lance!"

"No," replied Anselme, "you must make no such vow; for it may not be God's will. Follow in the footsteps of the holy Saint Martin of Tours, your patron saint. When he was a young soldier in the army of Julian the Apostate, he won the love of all around him by the purity of his life, and the kindness of his acts. You remember how one day he saw in the streets of Amiens a poor beggar, half-naked and perishing with cold? His heart was full of pity; and taking his sword, he divided his cloak and gave half to the beggar. That night the Lord Christ stood before him in a vision, and on His

shoulders He wore the half-cloak that Martin had given to the beggar. He asked an angel who attended Him, 'Know ye who hath thus arrayed Me? My servant Martin, yet unbaptized, hath done this.' It was long after that he entered the Church, yet all the time he lived a life of purity and love, and when God called him, he gave up the world gladly. You are not too young to bind yourself to follow in the footsteps of Saint Martin, leaving the question of your separation from the world to the God who governs all."

When Anselme finished, Raimbaut sprang to his feet, the light of a great enthusiasm on his face. He drew his dagger, and, taking his mantle from the wall, slashed it from collar to hem. He threw the strip of cloth into the ashes on the hearth. Then drawing the severed mantle over his shoulders, he knelt before the image of the Blessed Virgin, and, crossing himself, declared in his brave young voice, —

"I swear to Our Blessed Lady, by my hope of Heaven, that I will live a life of love and purity, with the help of my patron, good Saint Martin, in whose steps I follow. In proof of this, and to remind me of my oath, I will wear a severed mantle all my life."

CHAPTER III

THE GARDEN OF LOVE

THE months that followed Raimbaut's rescue from death and the taking of his vow were uneventful. Only the good priest realized how deep an impression the experience had made upon the boy. Michonne's frugal soul was pained when she saw the severed mantle, but she found no fault, having been warned by Anselme. Peirol spent many hours daily with the young falcons, but grew dull and lethargic as soon as he left them, and gave no hope of being his own jolly self again. The men with whom he had crossed swords, and the women with whom he had exchanged glances, came no longer to see him; and so isolated was the little household that it was greatly excited when a message arrived inviting Raimbaut to go to Courthézon as a squire. It was a summons from his over-lord, a command to be obeyed.

Raimbaut was well-grown. Anselme had taken great pains with his education, and he had been carefully taught by old Thibaud in all manly exercises; yet he needed the training which could be obtained only in a rich castle with its large retinue.

Raimbaut received the summons on a sultry July evening, when he came tramping into the court-

yard after a day on the hills. Perched on his wrist was a white falcon, hooded and motionless, as if carved in marble. Her beak and talons were red with blood, and Jacques followed at his master's heels with the feathered quarry she had snatched from the air.

When Thibaud told the news, Jacques was voluble with excitement; but Raimbaut tethered the falcon to the high sedile, and went into the castle without a word.

It was noon on the next day when he announced his decision to go to Courthézon. Anselme was depressed, and Michonne moved to tears. The latter, however, forgot her grief in anxiety that Raimbaut should be properly equipped. This was a task of such magnitude that it occupied all her waking moments. Assisted by the village tailor, she cut over some of Peirol's garments to her own satisfaction, although Raimbaut was a little doubtful concerning them. The tailor had but one piece of cloth rich enough for the young lord of Vacqueiras: this he had obtained at the great fair of Beaucaire, from a Venetian merchant. The pattern was of wonderful complexity, and there were as many colors as on Joseph's famous coat. So gaudy was it that Raimbaut protested; but Michonne, having the peasant-woman's love of color, sided with the knight of the shears, and the cloth was converted into a mantle. It was with a feeling of intense satisfaction, however, that Raim-

baut cut from it a huge piece in proof of his vow to Saint Martin.

A full week was required to prepare the boy from the tips of his pointed shoes to the peak of his tall hat; but a sunny afternoon found him equipped for his journey, with the household assembled in the courtyard to bid him farewell. So dazzling was the mantle, that Thibaud's ancient charger shied as he had not done for a decade; and the half-broken colt was so startled by the brilliant reds and yellows, that it needed all Raimbaut's skill to mount.

There was a faint cheer as he rode through the gate, leaving Anselme standing silent and sorrowful, with the little knot of servants. It was a melancholy departure, in spite of Jacques, who clung to Raimbaut's stirrup, chatting cheerfully all the way down the hill. His young master had promised to find a place for him in the Count's household, and he was making wonderful plans for the future.

When they reached the round hill, Raimbaut paused for a last look at Vacqueiras, and waved his hand in the hope that his father might be looking from the embrasure; but Peirol had been in his most sullen mood, and had apparently understood nothing at all of what had been told him. They came to the cross-roads where Peirol had received his hurt, and Raimbaut's heart was very tender as he turned to the left and jogged along toward Courthézon.

The road was fetlock-deep with dust, the fields were brown and sear, and there was not a breath of wind to stir the branches of the almond trees. But the sun was shining as it shines only on the fair land of Provence, where the people have never quite forgotten to worship the God of Fire.

Raimbaut's depression had almost disappeared when he entered the big gate at Courthézon and rode along the main street. It was neither very wide nor very straight; but there were fine shops with bright colors in the windows, and it was with a light heart that Raimbaut entered the great courtyard of the castle. He bade Thibaud farewell at the gate, but the old man-at-arms rode away on his shaggy steed, quite unable to speak, because of the lump in his throat.

The sentinel called a small page, playing with his companions in an archway, who came running up and took Raimbaut in with a comprehensive glance, which lingered on the garish mantle. A most knowing little fellow he was, who informed him that the Count was in the garden, and that the orders were to take Messire Raimbaut thither at once. Giving a very low bow, in which was a strange mingling of official deference and individual impertinence, he turned on his heel, and, followed by Raimbaut, led the way over the rough stones of the court.

In the farther corner was a low arch which led to an iron-studded gate. At the knock of the page it was opened, and Raimbaut entered

the beautiful *cour d'amour*, famed throughout all Provence.

More than a garden of love, it seemed a very garden of Paradise to the boy, who had been brought up among the brown rocks of Vacqueiras. True, he had seen the glories of springtime, and the almond trees in bloom. He had inhaled the fragrance of the hawthorn by the road, and the mignonette on the hillside. He had stretched full length in the lush grass of the meadows which lay outside the village, and listened to the ripple of the water over the pebbles. But this little half-acre, set in an angle of the walls, was like a jewel. He caught his breath as he took in the beauties around him, and stopped a moment, dazzled by his surroundings. Here were no seared grasses and dust-sprinkled leaves. The hot sun of the Midi, which had made the country like a desert and the roads tracks of ashes, had served here to force the vegetation into a luxuriance almost tropical. And the reason was not far to seek, for the ripple of water was everywhere. Led by a viaduct from the hill, a bubbling stream ran close to the wall and disappeared through an aperture, splashing loudly into the brook below, which acted as a moat to protect the town. All around was the freshness of green grass, the color of flowers, and the waving of graceful branches. The air was heavy with fragrance; not the well-known odor of the hawthorn and almond, but the perfume of strange blossoms such as Raimbaut had

never known before. His guide hurried ahead along the winding path, and Raimbaut was free from the sharp eyes which lingered so mockingly on his gaudy costume.

How the boy wished he might wander in this garden alone! But he followed his guide, whom he found waiting impatiently at the next turning of the path. With the sound of running water, there was mingled the ripple of laughter and the murmur of voices, which grew louder as they neared the far corner of the garden. This was encircled by a hedge, trimly clipped, and a carven balustrade. It was approached by lichen-covered steps, which Raimbaut mounted just as there came a few chords on the lute, and a voice started up in song: —

"When Spring climbs o'er the Southern hill
And wakens every springing rill,
My youthful longings then upspring;
Like flowers that feel the Springtime thrill,
My springing soul revives until
I spring the joy of life to sing!"

With every repetition of the word "spring" rolled out from a mellow throat, the wind in the trees and the water in the fountain seemed to join in a louder undertone. As the Count sang the last line, the notes were so high and so thin that they were lost in the voices of the wind and water.

A little group was gathered around a low fountain, from which the water trickled lazily into the pool, and a half-dozen figures reclined on the lawn, their

rich costumes rainbowed against the green grass. Around them flitted pages, passing to and fro from a table covered with fruits and flasks of wine.

The first to notice Raimbaut was a boy who was tossing fragments of wheaten bread to the fish in the pool. His attention was called to the strange figure at the entrance by a huge wolf-hound, who left his side and slowly approached Raimbaut with bristling back, bared fangs, and angry eyes. The boy at the fountain said nothing, but watched with a mocking smile, evidently enjoying Raimbaut's hesitation and anxiety, as he put his hand to his dagger.

Next, a huge cavalier whose bold black eyes were wandering about for fear some one would see him furtively pressing the hand of the lady by his side, discovered the bright mantle at the steps. He whispered to his companion, and she turned her pale face also. Then one after another discerned the waiting figure, but did not speak; for when the Count sang, there was no one rash enough to interrupt him. So he warbled on unconscious, his gaze now heavenward, and now into the daring eyes of a tall girl who looked up saucily into his face. She was slender as a young poplar, and clad in a robe of yellow samite. Her attitude, as she reclined full-length on the lawn, was as careless and unrestrained as that of a mountain nymph, and her long braids were like two gleaming serpents twining in the grass.

The Count sang easily and confidently, but treated the high notes with respect, as a wise man should who had passed his fiftieth year. His pose was not ungraceful, and his costume was skilfully cut and so disposed as to conceal his enormous bulk. His head was bald, but time had brought no wrinkles to his cheek nor dimmed the brilliancy of his fine eyes. In spite of his present grossness, it was easy to believe that a score of years ago he was, in truth, the most irresistible gallant in all Provence.

Raimbaut always remembered his great namesake, Count Raimbaut d' Aurenga, as he looked that afternoon in his garden of love and sang his famous song to the end. Every note was carefully placed, every accent studied, each glance, each movement rehearsed. It was an object-lesson to one ambitious to become a troubadour; and Raimbaut gazed with wonder and listened with admiration. The Count was a little too sure of applause, and yet no one could help liking the plump singer as he received the plaudits with a proud smile and a deprecating hand.

"You are in rare good voice to-day, my dear brother!" said the pale lady, still looking at Raimbaut.

"There is none like you in all Languedoc either to find a song, or sing it!" declared the dark cavalier with the roving eye.

"And as a proof of your skill, my good lord, look

you at the Bird of Paradise with the bright feathers, which has flown down to us from the heavens!"

The last words were from the tall girl reclining on the grass, whose laughing eyes were turned on Raimbaut as he stood waiting doubtfully.

At this the boy by the pool gave a low whistle which called back his dog, and the little page, who had taken occasion to help himself to a glass of wine unnoticed, made a low bow and announced: "Messire Raimbaut of Vacqueiras."

Raimbaut never quite forgot his sensations as he stepped forward into the circle of richly apparelled people by the fountain. Impressionable to a degree, he knew he was badly dressed, and that each well-cut, perfect fitting garment cried out in derision against his own village-made costume. He felt that all the company were unfriendly or contemptuous, and that they waited only for their cue from the Count to make him the butt of their sharp wits. His gay mantle seemed to burn his shoulders, as if it were the flame of fire it resembled. Yet he did not flinch as he faced the Count and waited for his lord to speak.

There was but a moment of doubt as the Count looked searchingly into his gray eyes; then stretching out a plump white hand, he drew the boy to him and bestowed a kiss on his cheek.

"Welcome to Courthĕzon," he said, a trifle huskily, as if the song had been too much for him. "Welcome to Courthézon, my lad, and may you

find it a kind home! How fares the good Peirol?"

"He is well, my lord," replied Raimbaut, "and sends his respects to you."

"Sorry am I," said the Count, "that he cannot bring them instead. A good comrade was he to me for many a long day. You are welcome to Courthézon for his sake. To-morrow you shall receive your sword in the chapel. To-night you must go fasting to bed; but as the sun is not yet behind the hills, you may eat and drink your fill at the table. I envy you the thirst which a ride from Vacqueiras must give you. I remember every foot of the road. Pained am I that I must seem forgetful of my good friend, but the pressure of affairs and the weight of this unwieldy body, make it well-nigh impossible for me to mount a horse."

There was no longer doubt of the Count's goodwill. The first to step forward was the tall cavalier with a smile on his olive cheek, as he introduced himself as "Guilhem of Berguedan — your father's friend and comrade." He was suavity itself, and his voice like honey; but Raimbaut felt irresponsive in spite of the cordiality of the giant Spaniard, for he liked him not.

The Countess des Baux spoke a few gracious words, in tones untouched by any note of friendliness. The Count, her husband, a sunburnt knight, looking out of place in the gay company, rose from the shadow of the hedge, took Raimbaut by the

hand, and wished that he might become as good a knight as his father.

"I have," said he, "a helmet at home which Peirol spoiled for me at the tournament at Beaucaire. He sliced a piece from it as if it had been the rind of a cheese."

One after the other, they all spoke to Raimbaut. Last of all, the demoiselle with the blue eyes put her hand on his shoulder and asked, —

"Why came you not to me a month ago, my pretty boy? Now am I promised to marry this ugly Count of Cabaret," pointing to a tall young cavalier with thin legs and a vacuous smile, who stood behind her. "You are much more to my liking; but alas, you come too late!"

She spoke reproachfully, toying with a fold of his cloak. She was clearly laughing at him, but there was a caressing tone in her voice; and the dimples in her cheek were displayed as a sure sign of friendliness. Her remarks were a signal for much jollity, in spite of the fact that the Count was silent and thoughtful in his huge chair by the fountain.

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "how came this misfortune upon you? You have torn a piece from your fine mantle: and truly, I have never seen its like before!"

Raimbaut hesitated a moment, for it was difficult to be serious in answer to such gaiety.

"I must tell you," said he at last, looking bravely into the beautiful face, "that the piece

was severed by my own dagger to remind me of a vow."

At this Loba (for such he learned was the young girl's name) laughed long and merrily.

"Listen to that!" she cried. "This lad has taken upon himself a vow, as if he were already a knight or troubadour. Come, tell me what you have sworn to do, or not to do! I like nothing better than to help break a solemn oath!"

"It is no great thing," answered Raimbaut, "though it means much to me. I have sworn to follow in the footsteps of my patron, Saint Martin of Tours, living a life of purity and charity toward all. I have resolved also to seek the Perfect Love with a single heart, careless where my quest may lead me."

"Here is a second Galahad come among us!" cried Loba; "and truly," said she, turning to Berguedan, who was smiling over her shoulder, "the boy could not be in a better place than Courthézon. We are all disciples of love, are we not?"

"Yes," replied Berguedan, "we are of the same brotherhood, he and I. Love has always been the goal toward which I have struggled."

"I warrant you do not travel far on the same path with this earnest lad!" murmured Loba, serious for the moment. Then she shrugged her shoulders impatiently, took Raimbaut to the table, and filled two generous glasses of wine.

"Come," said she, "my young Saint Martin, you

had me for the moment looking into the cell of a nunnery, though I am not yet ready to give up a very pleasant world. You cannot refuse to drink with me, when I wish you success in your quest of the Perfect Love?"

Raimbaut had touched nothing since early morning; but the rich wine, flaming into his cheeks, made less riot in his blood than Loba's smiles. Indeed, he could not eat until she had left him, and had gone to the Count, to sit again at his feet and gradually win him back to a jovial mood with her bright sallies.

The boy with the hound had come forward readily enough when presented as, "My sister's son, Guilhem des Baux. He is of your own age, and mayhap you may be good comrades, as were Peirol and I in the old days, before I had grown a mountain of flesh, and he had come to his grievous hurt."

It was the first time Raimbaut had met a boy of gentle blood, and his heart went out in friendliness toward the handsome lad who spoke so softly and pleasantly. A trifle taller than Raimbaut, he was not so broad and sturdy. His cheeks were red and white, where Raimbaut's were red and brown from the constant caresses of the sun; but there was a subtle resemblance between them as they faced each other. He asked Raimbaut many questions concerning Vacqueiras, which he had never visited, although he had ridden near its walls when far afield with the hawks. The dog followed close at

Guilhem's heels, a malevolent light in her red eyes.

"Which like you best," asked he innocently, "the falcons, or the dogs?"

"The falcons," answered Raimbaut. "I have some at home which I took from the nest with my own hand. I should be glad to test one of them with any good bird here in Courthézon. I like a dog, too," he continued; "but this of yours, it is very plain, loves me not."

Indeed, the wolf-hound seemed about to spring at him, but the Count des Baux hit her a shrewd clout, at which she crept slowly away, not deigning to howl.

"Oh! Touche is a gentle beast," declared Guilhem easily; "a trifle doubtful of strangers, but in a day or two sure to be friendliness itself."

"Friendly, say you!" exclaimed his father. "She is possessed by a devil. There is scarce a varlet in the castle but has felt her teeth, and yesterday, the young squire from Avignon left half his mantle in her mouth when he rode away. I warned you then, that should she bite again, I would have her killed without mercy. She was always an evil beast; yet I have never seen her so malevolent as with the young sire of Vacqueiras here."

"A nasty-tempered brute indeed!" muttered the Count of Cabaret with a shrug; and Berguedan declared with an oath, —

"Choose you rope, poisoned bone, or dagger; I

will furnish either, and dance on her grave with a joyful heart."

At this there was a chorus of condemnation, under which Touche, as if understanding every word, slunk sullenly to the shelter of the hedge. She was soon forgotten; for Berguedan, who had been asked to sing, struck a chord or two and swung into a song of Catalonia. He was a famous troubadour: his song was new, full of the passion of his native land, and at the end he received plaudits little less hearty than were given to Count Raimbaut himself.

Then the fair Loba told a story. Her face was innocent and in her voice the echoes of childhood still lingered. It was no child's story she told, however. The jolly company laughed and almost wept for merriment, but Raimbaut, though he listened with all his ears, could not understand. His education at Vacqueiras had not prepared him for a tale like this.

So the time passed pleasantly, until the shadows grew long; with the set of sun the circle broke up, and they wended their way through the iron-studded gate into the courtyard.

The Count, inquiring carefully concerning Peirol, walked with Raimbaut, and turned him over to the seneschal, who took him to a little room high up in the tower.

Raimbaut had learned that he was to spend the evening fasting and in meditation. Early in the

morning must come confession; after which, in the chapel, he should receive his sword as a badge of his rank.

When the seneschal left him, Raimbaut cast off the parti-colored mantle which had grown so heavy on his shoulders. He troubled not to hang it on the wall, but threw it on the floor; and for a long time stood at the narrow aperture of his window and looked out over the fields toward Vacqueiras. His heart went out toward his old home; toward his father — he could see him sitting silent at his window; toward Anselme on his knees in the church, and old Thibaud carefully tending the falcons. Of Benizet and Jacques he thought regretfully, and of Michonne going about her work with a heavy heart. Of one person only in all Vacqueiras did he think angrily, and that was the tailor who had made the mantle, now spread, a mimic sunset, on the cold stones of the floor.

When he had thrown off his clothes and crept into bed, he lay a long time awake. His meditations ran little on the morrow and what it meant to him — his first step toward knighthood. Of the religious side of the rite he thought not at all. He went over the last few hours again and again. One after another, the merry company in the garden of love passed before him. How kind the Count had been! Would Guilhem be his friend? On Loba he thought longest: he could see her slender young figure in the yellow robe as she faced him, her hand

in the folds of his mantle. He could see her blue eyes with the mixture of laughter and liking in them, the dimples in her cheek, and the red lips parted in a smile. He fell asleep thinking of her; but his dreams were not of Loba, for all night long he was face to face with Touche. The gaunt wolf-hound was waiting to spring on him, her teeth bared, the ruff on her neck erect with anger, her red eyes ablaze with hatred. She seemed the incarnation of an evil spirit which had come into his world, against which he must struggle, and which would throttle him if he proved not brave and strong.

CHAPTER IV

THE TOLEDO BLADE

When Raimbaut awoke from his troubled sleep, the wind was blowing and the rain beating against the castle walls. The *mistral*, like a demon let loose, had swooped down from lofty Ventoux, and the valley was trembling beneath his wrath. For a short distance Raimbaut could follow the road to Vacqueiras, but the village itself had disappeared, and left him with a feeling of loneliness such as he had not known since he rode out of its creaking gate.

He had no way of telling what the hour was. He hurried into his clothes, crept down the stairs, and tiptoed into the dimly lighted chapel. He had barely ended his examen of conscience when there appeared the rosy-cheeked little chaplain, who greeted him with a smiling, "God be with you, my son;" rubbing his sleepy eyes as he spoke.

Confession to such a kindly soul was not an ordeal, and Raimbaut had not many sins to tell. Neither was the ceremony at the altar a long one, and it was only when the priest took the sword from its resting-place between the candles, that the boy began to comprehend the meaning of the rite. He had always thought of the sword as a shining blade with a jewelled hilt, by which he should carve his way to fame and fortune. He had planned with

it to perform brave deeds which should be known not only in sunny Provence, but beyond the Alps and Pyrenees. He had seen himself beating down all before him in the lists, and bowing before the Queen of Beauty as she leaned from her high dais to bestow a golden goblet, saying, "Brave knight, receive this prize of valor; wear it as you have won it!"

But here in the dark chapel no thought of his lady could penetrate, and the sword in the priest's hand was dull and plain. Even the priest had changed. He was no longer a small man with rosy cheeks, but a stern servant of the Church of God as he said, —

"To-day you lay aside your boyhood, and take upon yourself manly duties which this sword typifies. It is your first step toward knighthood."

As Raimbaut knelt on the cold gray stones, the wheezy voice became strong and sonorous: —

"Beware, my son, lest you take this sword carelessly with thoughts only of earthly glory."

When the benediction was pronounced, Raimbaut felt as if he had stepped into deep waters, and as he rose and stood erect, his face was pale and his eyes lustrous. The priest hung the baldric over the boy's shoulder with the last solemn words of the ceremony: —

"Receive this sword in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Use it for your own defence, and that of the weak; use it to

protect the holy Church of God, and for the confusion of the enemies of the Cross of Christ."

A moment only they stood before the altar in silence, the boy's hand on the hilt of his sword. Presently the chubby little priest turned on his heel with a quiet but hearty, — "Now, my lad, you are a squire indeed. Get you to breakfast, and perform valiant deeds with knife and trencher." Yet not even these unheroic words could dispel the feeling of awe which had come over Raimbaut.

For a long time he lingered in the chapel, full of thoughts which he could not fathom. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" — "to protect the Church" — "for the confusion of His enemies" — "for your own defence" the priest had said; but not one word of "honor" or of his "lady." Even before the altar, he whispered, "The Church shall have her own; yet will I live for love, for song, and glory."

He found the rain was still pouring from the leaden clouds, the wind blowing furiously even in the shelter of the towers, and the courtyard ankle-deep with water. He was looking out doubtfully from the church door, when a page appeared suddenly before him, shook the rain-drops from his mantle, and gazed ruefully at his wet feet.

"At last, Messire Raimbaut, I have run you to earth," he declared. "My master is shut in his room with a chill he caught in the garden yesterday. He wishes to see you."

"I am sorry you have had a long search," replied Raimbaut. "Show me the way quickly, lest my master be angry."

"It will not hurt him to wait," declared the page, as a violent blast swept across the yard, bearing with it a torrent of rain. "Do you see the gentle Touche watching us under the arch? We shall be lucky to pass her with only a rent in our mantles and none in our hides."

It was with a strong feeling of repulsion that Raimbaut looked at the vicious beast lurking in the shadows, and he felt a chill to his very marrow while the little page told his story.

"Do you know the tale the huntsman tells of Touche? He declares she was once a good dog, kindly with every one, unequalled in the chase. One day while hunting in the dense forests of Ventoux she killed a huge wolf, which made strange sounds like that of a man in his death-agony. From that day, she was a changed dog, going about sullen and resentful. When the huntsman is in his cups, he never fails to claim that it was a were-wolf that Touche killed, and that the soul of the evil man, escaping from the carcase of the wolf, took possession of the body of Touche. It is for this reason she goes about in enmity with all the world. Everyone fears her bite lest he be filled with her evil spirit. No one dare slay her, for he may be possessed by the devil set free at her death."

While the tale was being told, Touche was slowly

approaching the two lads, snarling angrily and eyeing them viciously. Raimbaut's hand crept again to his dagger, but the little page reassured him by saying, —

"She will not touch us, here on the threshold of the church."

Whether the sacred building would have been a sufficient sanctuary was left in doubt, for just then there came a shrill whistle, at which Touche started, and turning reluctantly from them, slunk across the rain-swept courtyard.

Raimbaut followed his guide up the winding stairs, and found his lord, clothed in a long pelisse of blue velvet, shivering before a fire which made the room like a baker's oven. His face was flushed and his breathing difficult. The boy gasped for air as the Count greeted him, —

"Well, my lad, you are now a squire, and can look forward to your golden spurs. I remember well the morning when I received my sword. It was not a day like this, but fair and smiling. I can call to mind the priest's words and my own thoughts, though two-score years have passed. Alas, that I kept not to the high resolves I made that day!"

The Count began cheerfully, but ended with a note of sadness. He sank into a brown study, looking into the fire, and occasionally shaking his head at unpleasant memories. For a while he seemed quite to lose himself, but he awoke suddenly from his revery with a pious, "May the saints plead

for me, and the good God forgive!" Then turning to Raimbaut, he said, —

"It was the taking down of this sword last night, my boy, that brought back memories to me that were well-nigh dead. It was this sword and your presence. Come close to the firelight, that I may look at you."

The Count raised his huge body upright in the chair, and gazed into Raimbaut's face until the boy reddened at the long scrutiny.

"Yes, my lad, you are like, very like," he said huskily, putting his hand on Raimbaut's shoulder and drawing him closer.

The latter was filled with wonder. Why did his presence recall "memories well-nigh dead"? Whom did he resemble? What was the reason of the Count's sudden interest in one whom he had never cared to see, although Vacqueiras was but a few leagues away?

Suddenly the Count's mood changed and he spoke cheerfully.

"Well, my boy, how do you like your sword? It looks a worthless blade, does it not? The baldric is worn and shabby too, for it has hung on these walls untouched, a dozen years; yet the leather is from Cordova and was once brave and bright and sightly. But the baldric matters not much, after all. Draw the sword and let me see it. This blade was forged in far Toledo, and in the waters of the Tagus was it tempered. There is not its equal in

all Provence, and in the hilt there is a hair of Saint Martin himself. Take it and see how firm a grip it gives. Swing it over your head and feel its balance. Note how light it is and how quickly the blow follows the hand; yet it will cut deeper than a blade twice its weight, and its edge will not turn against helmet or mail of proof."

As the Count spoke, Raimbaut examined the sword carefully, then swung it over his head, striking to right and left against imaginary assailants. He made a pretty picture in the bright firelight, and the Count watched him with an expression of mingled admiration and sadness.

"How did you come by it, my lord?" inquired the boy wonderingly. "Tell me, you did not buy it, but won it in a tourney or on the field of battle?"

"Alas! through no deed of daring did I gain this sword," replied the Count. "A woman's white hand gave it: a woman who loved me, and of whom I was not worthy."

"And yet," interposed Raimbaut, "I doubt not that brave deeds were done to win the lady's favor, or the sword had gone elsewhere. I like it better for the lady's part; but tell me why you give it now to me, who have no right to carry so good a blade."

As Raimbaut asked this question, his eyes lost their dreaminess and he looked into the Count's face keenly. But the latter answered, —

"Perhaps it is my fancy, without excuse; perhaps because your eyes and hair remind me of the lady

of long ago. It may be it is the way you hold your chin, a trick of speech, or a vagrant tone in your voice. Whatever my reason, the sword is yours. May you bear it worthily, and with it win great glory for yourself and the lady whom you praise." He spoke quickly, almost feverishly, and continued with scarce a pause: "That reminds me, I have not yet heard your voice. There is a lute in the corner. I will listen; sing what you will."

Raimbaut laid down his sword, and taking up the lute, sang one of the Count's own chansons: —

> "So tenderly she smiles on me
> I think that Heaven has opened wide;
> Four hundred angels I might see;
> Yet still I vow on bended knee
> I would not wander from her side."

When he finished, the Count applauded enthusiastically. He clapped his fat hands and cried, —

"Bravo! Bravo! I have never done it better myself! Your voice has rare quality and you have a touch like Bernart in his prime. Of course, you could not help being a singer, for it is in the blood. I should have known it before you opened your mouth."

Raimbaut was about to put the lute back in the corner, greatly pleased at the praise which he had won, when the Count stopped him and asked, —

"Do you know the *Aubado* of the Countess of Dia?"

"'Under the hawthorn branches, wind-caressed?'"

exclaimed Raimbaut. "It is the most perfect song that has ever been found. I know and love every word of it."

Raimbaut struck a few diminishing minor chords on his lute, and then sang with wonderful feeling for one so young: —

"Under the hawthorn branches, wind-caressed,
She laid her head upon her lover's breast,
Till cried the guard, 'Day comes, a welcome guest!'
O God! Why comes the dawn so soon?

"'Would that the shadows ne'er might pass away!
Would you might linger by my side for aye!
Would that the sentry had not seen the day!
O God! Why comes the dawn so soon?

"'Before the bird-songs in the meadow start
Give me one kiss, one thirsty kiss, sweetheart!
Fear not for jealous glances as we part!
O God! Why comes the dawn so soon?

"'One last caress, one blessed farewell word
Under this jewelled hedgerow, for I heard
The first low chanson of a waking bird.
O God! Why comes the dawn so soon?

"'He 's gone! Above his head the sky glows pink;
The breeze is perfume-laden, and I think
It is my darling's fragrant breath I drink!
O God! Why comes the dawn so soon?'

"Blissful the lady all the wide world knew;
Knights rode afar for her white hand to sue,
Yet still she cried — loyal of heart and true —
'O God! Why comes the dawn so soon?'"

Until the music ended, the Count sat facing the fire, his eyes shaded by his hand. What was the

boy's dismay to see the unwieldy form suddenly collapse, and break into a torrent of tears and incoherent words! Again and again Raimbaut caught the name, "Philippa! Philippa!" in tones of love and longing. The Count seemed to be making a plea for pardon and a promise of atonement, forgetting all else but memories of the past.

Minute followed minute, and at last the sobs ceased altogether, and the Count composed himself. He turned to Raimbaut.

"My boy, I have much to tell you, but I am not strong enough to-day. To-morrow I will send for you."

He kissed Raimbaut absent-mindedly, his lips hot with fever. His last strange words were, —

"May you prove always faithful to God and loyal to your lady! May God forgive me if I counsel you to sin against Him, rather than be untrue to the woman who loves you!"

Raimbaut left his over-lord huddled in his chair, gazing sadly into the red embers.

CHAPTER V

THE BOOK OF HOURS

THE week that followed Raimbaut's investment with the title of squire was a most unhappy one. The Count was confined to his room, and the boy was forced to adjust himself to his surroundings as best he could. In spite of his association with Anselme and Bernart, his manners were in many respects those of a village lad, and at first he was a constant source of amusement to the other squires. Taking their cue from Guilhem, who was their leader in all things, they proceeded to make Raimbaut uncomfortable by an endless list of petty annoyances.

One night he found a pair of rusty spurs in his bed, and the next, discovered a colony of squirming eels, freshly captured from the brook. He was dropped into a cistern by a treacherous plank, and escaped drenched and half-drowned. He was sent on foolish messages of imaginary persons. In short his vow of charity toward all was thoroughly tested.

He endured his trials so good-naturedly, accepting them as the novitiate of a new-comer, that his companions soon agreed the Severed Mantle was not a subject for mockery. So full of kindness was the lad from Vacqueiras, that first one and then

another yielded to the charm of his friendliness, and by the end of the week he could count his ill-wishers on the fingers of one hand. They were Guilhem, the Countess Tyburge, Berguedan, Miguel, his squire and, last though not least, Touche the wolf-hound. He was a little doubtful concerning the Countess Tyburge, but in spite of her apparent graciousness, she was always watching him out of the corners of her eyes, and whispering with Berguedan in some window-seat.

Raimbaut did not allow himself to believe that Guilhem would not return his friendship; yet if there was any truth in the old saying, "Like dog, like master," no better proof of Guilhem's enmity was needed than the attitude of Touche; for, however Guilhem might keep up a semblance of cordiality, his dog made no attempt to conceal her hatred.

Raimbaut measured Berguedan by much the same standard as that by which he judged Guilhem. The Spaniard was always soft-spoken, bland, and smiling, but Miguel was not a hypocrite, and neglected no opportunity to show his hostility. This Miguel was a swarthy youth from the mountains of Tarragona. A little older than the other squires, he was a full head taller, and bade fair to become a giant in strength and stature. It was he who pulled the plank from under Raimbaut's feet. In fact he perpetually worried the new-comer.

One day, when the squires were having a foot-race, Miguel dropped a lance in front of Raimbaut's flying feet, sending the latter full length on the ground. He rose, bruised but smiling, and taking the lance in his hand, he walked up to Miguel and said, —

"Messire Miguel of Tarragona, as you know, I have sworn to live like Saint Martin in charity with all the world, yet I must warn you that if you ever meddle with me again, I shall forget my vow just long enough to break this lance over your head. I shall do this without anger or malice, to teach you the manners you have not learned in Spain."

He faced Miguel, clear-eyed and alert, without the least sign of fear, and there was a shout of approval from the squires who looked at him with wonder. The Spaniard was furious, but as the seneschal was just then passing, Miguel was obliged to swallow the rebuff with such good grace as he could command. By this act Raimbaut established a reputation for courage which his kindliness had left in doubt.

In all these persecutions Guilhem took no open part. Hungry for friendship, in spite of his distrust, Raimbaut's heart went out to the plausible young Count, and they were much together. Raimbaut even tried to make friends with Touche, but the wolf-hound would accept no overtures and watched him like an evil spirit, threatening and sinister. His great comfort was Loba, who gave

him many a smile and an occasional caress, when Jourdain of Cabaret was not too close to her elbow.

While Raimbaut's favor was hanging in the balance, he was asked to sing one evening after supper. With his first note he won his audience, and when he had finished, there was a storm of applause. Again and again he sang for them, chansons, sirventes, tensos; aubados gave place to serenades, and he ended with a peasant song, full of the atmosphere of the vineyard and the olive grove, which caught the fancy of the varlets and men-at-arms, gathered in the far end of the hall.

There had been several days of calm, and Raimbaut was beginning to think that he had served his novitiate and was to be left in peace. It was late in the afternoon. He had completed his duties in the tilt-yard, and was sitting cross-legged in the library with a huge volume on his knees. It was the story of Godefroi of Bouillon, and Raimbaut had followed the life of the crusader from his boyhood in Lorraine to his burial on Calvary. He read with beating heart that, although Godefroi was not tall nor broad, he could with one blow of his sword cleave a horseman from head to saddle. His soul was thrilled at the discovery of the holy lance which had pierced the side of Christ on the Cross, and by whose miraculous assistance Godefroi with only twenty thousand men captured Jerusalem. His admiration knew no bounds at the hero's refusal of the royal crown, on the spot where the Saviour had

been crowned with thorns. Again and again he read over the words that impressed him most: "He would fight the infidel, rather than possess pure gold and silver money, rather than amuse himself hunting or in flying the hawks."

Raimbaut was picturing himself, after a furious slaughter of the infidels, placing with his own hand the banner of the Cross on the walls of Jerusalem, when his dreams were shattered by the entrance of the Count. The latter was pale and weak after his illness, and Raimbaut noticed that the hand trembled which was placed on his shoulder.

"Are you fond of reading?" asked the Count.

"Indeed I am," replied Raimbaut. "I like it better than anything except singing, though a day in the fields with a good falcon gives me almost equal pleasure."

"If you will come with me," said the Count, "I will show you some manuscripts more beautiful than any you can find here. I keep them in a chest in my own room, for they are the most precious things that I possess."

"Right pleased shall I be to see them," answered Raimbaut eagerly; and putting the volume back in its place, he followed the Count to his room.

It was almost exactly as Raimbaut had left it the week before; the fire still flamed on the hearth and the heat was like a furnace. The Count went to a far corner, where stood a chest bound with iron

and chained to the floor with a ring. He took a key from his girdle, unlocked the box and lifted the lid. It was evidently the treasure-chest of the castle. On one side there were rich garments, girdles heavy with gold and precious stones, jewelled daggers, and leathern bags through which could be seen the bulging coin.

In a small coffer were three books, each wrapped by itself in a piece of Genoese velvet. The first was a Virgil, the work of a Florentine scribe in the fourth century. It was bound in a cover of thick oak boards, held together at the back by a strip of Cordovan leather. It was crowded with miniatures showing the adventures of Æneas. Here he carried old Priam on his back away from the walls of Troy, surrounded by lurid flames. Here was the boat-race, with the oarsmen laboring strenuously, and the prows of the ships churning the blue water into foam. Most wonderful of all was a picture of the gods on Mount Olympus, seated among the clouds, eating ambrosia, and drinking nectar from gold cups.

The second volume was a Temptation of St. Anthony. It was of much more recent date, bound in pigskin and fastened with iron clasps. The miniatures were commonplace, but the fancy of the artist had run riot in grotesque initial letters and in borders of arabesque, which indicated the influence of Saracenic art.

The Count showed these two manuscripts hastily,

and Raimbaut was disappointed, for he caught only glimpses of their beauties. He would have liked to beg his master to allow him to study the volumes at his leisure, but he did not dare to do so.

When the Count came to the third book, he laid the others in the chest, and, leading the way to the window, bade Raimbaut take a seat by his side. The boy wondered at the trembling hand of his master, and noticed his laboring breath and flushed face. He was apparently under the influence of some strong emotion, for he hesitated a full minute before he began to speak, and then his voice was low and husky.

"It is to see this Book of Hours," said the Count, "that I brought you to my room. I prize it above everything I possess. It was given me by the Countess of Dia, and every letter on the parchment was penned by her white hand. I have seen many precious missals guarded jealously in church and cloister, but none can show lettering like this. Many a patient monk has wrought with skilful hands, but none has been able to equal this little manuscript."

The book was bound in crimson leather from Arabia, the like of which Raimbaut had never seen before. The clasps and bosses were of silver, and the corners were guarded by the same pure metal. In the centre of the initial cover there was a plaque of ivory, carved in relief, showing Saint Martin sharing his mantle with the beggar.

The Count opened the book with a strange expression of reverence on his fat face. The first page had almost no ornamentation.

"Do you notice," asked the Count, "how perfectly each letter is formed, and yet so great is its beauty that there is nothing set or formal when they are grouped together?"

"That I do," replied Raimbaut; "I have tried to work with the pen under the guidance of the good priest Anselme. My fingers are very stubborn, but I have learned enough to admire the skill of others and the beauty of this work. How smoothly the Countess has laid on the burnished gold! It is the pure metal, and Anselme tells me it will show just as bright a thousand years from now."

The Count next turned to a page with an illuminated border. The initial letter "A" was made of two dragons, their claws joined together to form the bar, and from them sprang a vine, twining and twisting until it covered all the page, save that occupied by the words themselves. From the main pattern there grew the slender stems to which were fastened the green leaves, the bright acanthus blossoms and the graceful tendrils.

"Is it not wonderful!" cried Raimbaut. "I have seen something like it in the springtime, when the vines were creeping in and out among the branches of the hawthorn hedge."

"Indeed," replied the Count, "there is no better model in nature for the illuminator than the coun-

try hedgerow. Do you notice how every page is a piece of parchment without a flaw, how pure and clear is the blue, and how brilliant are the rubrics?"

For a long time Raimbaut sat by the Count's side, the latter slowly and lingeringly turning page after page. When he spoke again, it was with a voice indicating the deepest feeling.

"I must tell you, before I show the miniatures in this book, that when the Countess of Dia gave it me, she left between the covers six blank pages. I had some skill with brush and pen. Indeed, there are those who say my work is equal to that of the famous old monk of Saint Martial at Limoges. I promised that I would decorate these pages with my own hand; but I am ashamed to tell you that many years passed before I made any attempt to fulfil my promise. Yet my vow grew heavy upon me, and at last I decided to do my best. As you will see," explained the Count, "this last page is still blank, except where I have lightly traced upon it the outlines of the grave, the recumbent body, the chapel and two chanting priests. This," continued the Count, turning back a few leaves, "shows David praying with a harp by his side. The distant landscape is finished, the blue sky, the golden cherubs and the flying angel. I confess I am a little proud of David's gray beard and of the ermine cape, over which I labored very long and earnestly. The margin I have not yet touched. The next shows the border complete, with the exception of

the leaves and flowers. The miniature also, is nearly finished. Joseph is good, but the ass looks more like a destrier. When I began to paint it, I had no model; and when I obtained one, I had gone too far to change."

The Count then turned to a miniature of the shepherds on the hillside. Some were lying asleep with their white flocks around them, but one was lifting his eyes to heaven in an attitude of adoration before the chanting angels.

The next was the Annunciation. Here the miniature was complete and the border also. Naught remained to be done but the burnishing of the gold.

"Is it not beautiful!" exclaimed Raimbaut. "What a wonderful angel it is, with the yellow robe and the folded wings! See the purple canopy against which the Blessed Mother's halo shows so brilliantly; and there is God in the blue heavens, with the gold stars around Him! It is the best miniature of them all. I am sure there is nothing better in the whole world."

The Count smiled.

"I have not yet shown you the miniature which far surpasses everything else that I have done. I must tell you that I come to this with emotions so conflicting that it is difficult for me to speak. As an artist I look upon it with pride, but as a man it brings to me shame and sorrow. There are few who can review their past lives without regret, but I have been a sinner beyond compare. Listening

one day to the Bishop of Avignon, I was greatly impressed by these words: 'And now abideth Faith, Hope, and Love, these three; but the noblest of these is Love.' It occurred to me that I could paint on this first page of the breviary a miniature that should illustrate these words of Saint Paul; and I hope I was guilty of no sacrilege when I chose for the emblematical figures the three women who have most strongly influenced my life."

Raimbaut was filled with amazement as he listened. Why should the Count speak to him of things so intimate? He watched the thick white fingers as they turned the leaves; but when the first page was revealed to him, the boy held his breath with admiration. In the centre were the gray walls of a chantry, each stone in its place, pillar and arch and niche. Through one window there streamed the yellow light, and through another could be seen the towers of a distant city. Around the chantry twined graceful vines and tendrils, with their fruitage of leaf and bud and blossom. The colors were as beautiful as an April rainbow, and the flecks of burnished gold were like scattered sunbeams. So possessed was the boy by the lovely picture that he could not speak, and he listened breathless as the Count went on.

"This figure in the robe of old rose is the Countess Ermengarda of Narbonne. Though I cannot say that I loved her over-much, she was devoted to me with her whole soul. Although not strictly beauti-

ful, she was warmhearted and impetuous, and with her I had my first dream of love. I confess I tired of her, and many little affairs had I until, wandering far afield, I came to northern Italy. Here I met a young demoiselle, and for her I was possessed by a desire which wholly mastered me. I had been used to easy conquests; here I found myself held at bay. In spite of her pure face, I knew it was not for lack of passion, and I persisted, half-maddened by disappointment. At last I discovered that she was in love with a young knight, her neighbor, who could not sing a note or speak without stammering, so great his diffidence. I lingered until the very day of her marriage, and then fled back to Provence. She was the only woman over whom I could not in the least prevail, and a foolish resentment soon drove her from my heart. You can see her standing in the high niche as Saint Love. She is clad in pure white, and her eyes are downcast. So she would often keep them veiled under her long lashes, in spite of their wondrous beauty. She is dead: she was much too good for me, and is doubtless now a saint in Heaven.

"This third figure in the blue robe is the Countess of Dia. As Saint Hope she stands looking heavenward, in her hand a lute. She of all women loved me most devotedly, and I, confident of her devotion, did not value it until too late. It is she who to-day has full possession of my heart, though she long since ceased to love me. It was to me she

wrote that song of surpassing loveliness in which she abandoned herself completely to her pure passion, repeating again and again, 'O God! Why comes the dawn so soon!'"

As the Count spoke, tears rolled down his face, and for a little while he forgot Raimbaut's presence in the bitter memories of the past.

Raimbaut was full of sympathy for his master, pitying the loneliness which possessed him; but more than all else his heart was heavy with questions which he dared not ask.

When the Count broke the silence, he answered almost as if he had been reading the boy's thoughts.

"My lad, I cannot explain why I have told you so much, yet can tell no more. The good priest Anselme has been called back to his old home in northern France, and will return within the month. I will bring him here and try to right the wrongs of which I was guilty long ago. I have lately had many attacks of illness which are strange and terrifying, and greatly sap my strength. No one can find any clue to the source of my trouble, though Berguedan is giving me a medicine of which I have great hopes. It is in the fear that Death may take me unexpectedly, that I have brought you here to-day."

He closed the Book of Hours, and, touching a hidden spring, the ivory placque lifted. Behind it there was plainly evident a folded piece of parchment showing the red seal of the Count. He closed

the orifice and taught Raimbaut how it could be opened, bidding the lad press the spring with his own finger.

"I give you this book," said the Count, "trusting in your promise not to read the concealed parchment until you have won your golden spurs. I shall reveal all as soon as Anselme returns. I have many plans for you, which God willing, I will carry out. Yet would I guard against the hand of Death which I sometimes fear hangs over me. I believe I can trust your oath if you will swear by Saint Martin, your patron, to keep the secret inviolate until you are a knight indeed. Do you promise me?"

"I swear by Saint Martin," replied Raimbaut as he took the Book in his hand. "Is it my very own?"

"It is your own," answered the Count, "and you are to keep it securely hidden."

"I will," said Raimbaut. "I have a secret pocket in my tunic which Michonne made, and in which I have a precious clue to the assailant of my poor father. In this pocket I will put the Book. I will prize it as my life."

He opened the volume and looked at the miniature for a long time, his eyes beaming with joy and admiration. The Count watched him critically and at last inquired, —

"Which do you think is the most beautiful of the three?"

"Saint Love," replied Raimbaut.

"Saint Love, say you?" asked the Count, in a tone of surprise. "Do you think she is as charming as Saint Hope, with the dark hair and blue eyes which she lifts to Heaven?"

"She is indeed fair, but Saint Love is beautiful beyond compare. In my quest for the Perfect Love, if I find such a woman on the earth, to her I will give the whole adoration of my heart."

"May you find the Perfect Love!" declared the Count, smilingly. "May you never be untrue to the woman who loves you!"

For a little longer the lad and the man of the world looked together at the splendid miniature, and then the Count, pleading fatigue, sent Raimbaut away. The latter placed the Book of Hours carefully in his secret pocket and took his departure, wondering at his good fortune.

CHAPTER VI

GENTLE TOUCHE

When Raimbaut reached his room, he studied each page to the very end, and then, turning back leaf after leaf, gazed reverently upon the miniature of the three fair women. His soul was filled with admiration for Saint Faith; Saint Hope appealed with strange insistence to his heart; but when he looked upon white-robed Saint Love, lifted above the others in her high niche, there came to him a flood of rapture and devotion. Always keenly susceptible to the beautiful, the Saint Love in the chantry seemed to him the embodiment of his life's ideal, half-saint, half-woman. He fell upon his knees as if he knelt before the Cross itself.

"God is Love," said he under his breath; and then, "if God is Love, Love must be God!"

When he rose to his feet, it was with a singularly uplifted feeling. He took the piece of parchment from his pocket, placed the little tuft of red roan hair between two blank leaves at the end of the book, and carefully folded it inside the piece of vellum.

During the week that followed, he read the breviary faithfully at night and morning, and often looked at the miniature in the quiet of his room. Yet in

spite of the joy that the Book of Hours gave him, Raimbaut was conscious of a sensation of oppression. There seemed to be a dark shadow brooding over the castle, a vague terror in the air, which he felt but could not understand. He wondered how the other squires could be so light-hearted, and he looked in vain about him to find any one upon whose face there was the least sign of the fear that possessed him.

The Count was confined to his room. No one knew exactly what his illness was, but the seneschal was very grave and it was rumored that his master's condition was causing him great solicitude.

On the pale features of the Countess Tyburge only, there was an expression of anxiety, and now and then Raimbaut caught a look of apprehension in her eyes.

Berguedan seemed most unconcerned of all, but more than once Raimbaut saw his face grow stern and sinister as he whispered with the Countess in the shadow of the arras.

Still the life of the castle passed on much as before. In the morning there were gay parties riding out over the fields with the falcons, and in the afternoon there were songs and stories in the Garden of Love. The illness of the Count seemed to affect the happiness of his guests not at all. The flow of their conversation was as unaffected as the current of the brook, and the sound of their laughter as unrestrained as the ripple of the fountain, although their host was suffering and perhaps near to death.

The shadows were lengthening one afternoon when Raimbaut, in spite of Loba's smiles, left the gay party in the garden and sought the quiet of the library. He perched himself on a high fauteuil by the window, and tried to dispel his forebodings in the study of a wonderful bestiary which he had found in one of the chests. The pages were covered with figures of creatures such as were never seen under the blue skies of Provence, and the stories of strange beasts filled the boy with wonder. He was spell-bound as he read: —

"The asp is the serpent that guards the balsam. When a man wishes to gather it, he puts the asp to sleep with the music of instruments, and then secures the balsam. When the asp sees how it has been tricked, it stops one ear with its tail and rubs the other ear on the ground until it is filled with earth; then it cannot hear the music, and it is able to keep a safe watch."

Raimbaut was here interrupted by the entrance of the chaplain. The boy had met him again and again, and a strong friendship was springing up between them. It was therefore with an exclamation of surprise and solicitude that Raimbaut sprang to his feet, for the color had left the little man's round cheeks and his face was drawn and haggard.

"Tell me, good father, what is the matter?" asked Raimbaut.

"I cannot!" replied the priest with a shudder. "Indeed I must speak to the Countess Tyburge on

the instant;" and in spite of Raimbaut's detaining hand, he hurried away.

For a long time Raimbaut paced up and down the room, possessed with a presentiment of evil he tried in vain to analyze. He had, however, taken his seat again with the bestiary on his knees when Guilhem suddenly appeared at the doorway. He crossed the room, and, looking over Raimbaut's shoulder, exclaimed, —

"Oho! This is the way you busy yourself when you should be helping with the armor! Are you fond of pictures of wild beasts?"

"Verily I am," replied Raimbaut, "although I like tales like that of Godefroi of Bouillon better still."

"Well," said Guilhem, "if you wish to see pictures of strange creatures which make these in the book look like tame cattle in the pasture, come with me. I will show you the old tapestries in the East Tower."

Raimbaut knew the story of the famous tapestries wrought by the old Countess Tyburge, Guilhem's sainted grandmother, who in her old age became austerely religious. After giving large revenues to the Church, she undertook to impress those around her with the danger of sin, by making some tapestries which should illustrate vividly the sufferings of the damned. Her last sight was of the finished fabric, and her last thought satisfaction that she had escaped the dangers upon which her glazing eyes were fixed. After her death the tapestries were hung upon the wall of

the great hall, where they were in full view of every gathering. It did not take many months, however, to discover that no feast could be truly jovial with these portentous pictures visible, so they were relegated to the far East Tower, where the masonry was thick and the sun penetrated but for a moment just before setting. So gloomy was this room that it was seldom entered, and here the tapestries were left to the teeth of Time and the hungry moth.

It was a favorite recreation of Guilhem's to take a youthful page or squire to this room. He had no fancies, and he obtained an extreme amount of satisfaction in watching the white faces of those more susceptible, to whom the tapestries were a source of horror.

All this Raimbaut knew perfectly well. He realized that Guilhem's invitation was not a friendly one, yet it was a challenge to his courage which Raimbaut could not decline. So he cheerfully assented, put the bestiary back into the chest, and followed Guilhem. They passed along the corridor together, down the winding staircase, and through the clanging doors. Suddenly Raimbaut discovered that the sullen Touche was following at their heels, silent and watchful; yet he pretended not to notice the unwelcome addition to the party.

Guilhem was kindness itself. One hand was on Raimbaut's shoulder, and with the other he pointed out this chamber where some deed of blood had been committed, and that passage where a ghost had

walked. When they came at last to a door at the end of a winding gallery, his voice had sunk to a whisper, and Raimbaut's nerves were like harp-strings through which a wind had blown. So rusty were the hinges that it required their united efforts to open the door, and its creaking echoed through the stillness.

Unlike Guilhem, Raimbaut was susceptible to every horror. His cheek paled when he entered. Naked men and women consumed in lurid flames, prodded by imps and devoured by terrible monsters, covered three of the walls. A chill wind blew through the narrow embrasure, and, fanning the folds, gave a lifelike motion to every figure. No sign of emotion was lost to Guilhem, who slipped his hand through Raimbaut's arm and pointed out the worst terrors in a voice that was almost a groan.

They were standing in the farther corner of the room, Raimbaut's eyes fixed on the face of the Evil One himself, who looked out of the tapestry with a smile of satisfied malignity. To Raimbaut it seemed as if the fiend was about to speak, when Guilhem gave him a sudden push which sent him on his knees against the horrible folds.

For a moment he was powerless to rise, and when he gathered himself up he was alone, and the sound of flying footsteps was growing faint in the winding corridor. Raimbaut waited until the echoes died away; then he sprang forward with a cry. It was smothered in an instant, however, for in front of the

door stood Touche, her eyes red and wary, her yellow teeth bared, and the hair on her back erect with wrath.

He shrank back into the farther corner, leaning against the tapestry which he no longer feared, every instant expecting that the dog would spring on him, For several minutes he waited with protruding eyes, scarce breathing. Then he began to realize that Guilhem, with the utmost refinement of cruelty, had planned for him to spend the night in this awful room with Touche for his jailor.

The great beast, finding Raimbaut quiet, walked over to him, showing her red jowl, and seizing his tunic, worried it playfully. Then she took the boy's limp hand, and held it tightly between her long yellow teeth. At this his heart almost stopped beating; but still he stirred not. The dog circled the room two or three times, and then, giving a yawn, stretched herself comfortably before the threshold. She rested her huge muzzle on her paws and watched him with blinking and suspicious eyes.

The boy stood against the angle of the wall, his palms pressing the dusty cloth, the cold perspiration on his forehead. His knees were weak and he could not restrain their trembling, although he dreaded that even this slight motion might tempt Touche to spring. His muscles stiffened, and with the numbness of body his mind awoke and he began to realize his danger and to question how it might be met. His rigid body seemed dead. His eyes wan-

dered over his prison and he saw there was no escape but through the door. He measured carefully the height of the window; he thought he might reach it by a sudden spring, but the dog could reach it too and pull him down. He was doomed to spend the night where he was, in danger of attack at any moment, should he make a suspicious movement.

For a few moments his mind was as numb as his body, and then there came to him a hot anger against both Guilhem and Touche that warmed his very marrow. Rage came to him in a great wave, and his hand stealthily sought the short dagger at his belt. It was only a toy weapon, made more for ornament than use. A chance blow might find its way to a vital part, but he might be mangled by the yellow teeth whose touch would fill his veins with madness. There was danger even in killing her, lest the wicked spirit which had dwelt in the body of the were-wolf might enter his own soul. This he was resolved to risk. His enemies must not triumph over him! The malevolence of the world, which was personified in the wolf-hound, must not prevail!

His mind wandered to the hall, where he could picture the torches throwing their red light on every face. He could see Guilhem laughing mockingly, and with this thought there came the fixed determination to escape unscathed. But how? How could he overcome the spirit of evil that threatened him? His left hand was clutching the folds of the tapestry where the pieces had once joined, and through his

HE BALANCED THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

finger tips there came the first hint of hope. He thought the matter over as carefully as if his body were safe in the little castle of Vacqueiras miles away, and something of Peirol's readiness and courage seemed to spring up in the boy's heart. He balanced the chances of success and failure, waited until the final light of dusk was about to give way to complete darkness, then, lifting the fold of cloth with his left hand, he sprang suddenly behind it. With a roar the hound leaped at him, and her huge body struck against the wall close by his feet as, with one fierce wrench, he pulled the musty fabric from its support and fell forward, enveloping the struggling beast in the heavy folds.

The air was so laden with dust that Raimbaut could see nothing, but he clung with tooth and nail to the furiously wriggling body of the hound, whose struggles seemed only to entangle her the more. She was quite unable to use her eager fangs. Once only she freed herself, so that Raimbaut caught a glimpse of her bloodshot eyes. He muffled the gaping jaws. Throwing his weight upon the frenzied beast, he held her with both arms strained around her neck. She began to weaken. Her struggles grew less violent, and Raimbaut felt it was safe to reach for his dagger. Touche seemed to understand her danger, however, and again he was obliged to use both hands to restrain her furious efforts. At last she became quiet. Raimbaut snatched the weapon, and plunged it again and again through the tapestry into the

quivering body beneath. The hound made one final, desperate contortion, which almost freed her from the folds of the tapestry. Then a thrust from the dagger found a vital spot. The huge creature writhed for a moment, and then was still.

So exhausted was Raimbaut, that for several minutes he lay motionless as the dead dog beneath him. When his strength returned, he rose to his feet and threw back the tapestry. It was a horrible sight! The dog's eyes were protruding, her mouth open in an angry snarl, and her chops were thrown back, revealing the discolored teeth. The body itself had stiffened. The hind legs were extended at full length in agony, and there were a dozen wounds from which the blood trickled. Most of them were mere scratches, where the dagger had glanced from hard rib or tough muscle; but there were two or three where the sharp steel had found its way to a vulnerable place; and there was one, the last, through which the thrust had reached the brute's heart.

Despite his extreme exhaustion, there had come to Raimbaut no feeling of faintness, no repulsion, no weakening. His anger was fiercer than ever. For a moment he stood, his hands on his hips, considering what he should do. Then he wiped his dagger on the tapestry and replaced the weapon in his belt. He stooped over the carcass, grasped it firmly by the loose skin of the neck, and dragged it to the door. This he opened easily, so strong was he in his rage. Again he took up his burden and drew it into the

corridor. Down the long passage he staggered, until he came to a narrow staircase. It was a hard struggle, but he reached the top at last. He opened the door of Guilhem's apartment and dragged the body in. He threw it on the bed, shut the door behind him, and then stopped to consider.

He had known all the time that he must make his escape from Courthézon. The little castle of Vacqueiras was calling to him; he felt he must see his father again. The kindness of the Count and the promised revelation were alike forgotten. He hated all Courthézon! Suddenly he remembered his sword. This alone he resolved to carry with him. He crept to his own room and took the weapon from the wall where it hung by the side of his gaudy mantle. At sight of the garment a fancy seized him to be identified unmistakably with the death of the hound. He slung the baldric over his neck, took the mantle in his hand, and crept back to Guilhem's room. He propped the body of the dog with pillows so that it sat upright in the bed, and placed the mantle around the bloody shoulders. It was a gruesome picture, but Raimbaut laughed silently as he gave a last look from the doorway. Yes, Messire Guilhem also must have a shock to test his nerves!

Raimbaut stole down the staircase into the courtyard, which was well-nigh deserted. It was impossible to leave by any gate. He remembered that there were, in the far corner, some old scaling-ladders which would answer the purpose perfectly. He kept

in the shadow as much as possible, fortunately meeting no one, for his hands were stained with blood, and there was a red smear on his forehead. Skirting the parapet, he found the ladders, selected the lightest one, carried it to a black corner, and placed it noiselessly on the wall. He climbed to the top, drew the ladder after him, lowered it to the ground, and was free! Hiding the ladder in some bushes, he crept through the wet grass until he reached the road, and then set out for Vacqueiras as fast as his legs could carry him. He ran until he was out of breath, then threw himself under the hedge. When his strength came back, he rose and continued his journey at a more leisurely pace.

The wind had now gone down, the rain had ceased, and the stars were shining in a cloudless sky. The quiet of the night calmed the fever in his blood, and by the time he reached Vacqueiras, there had come to him a reaction from his rage. He could see the dim figure of the sentinel over the gate, but feared to disturb the whole village by his late entry. So he climbed the hillside, and selecting a soft bit of green turf close to the brook, he crept under the shelter of a hawthorn bush and fell asleep, with the ripple of the water in his ears.

CHAPTER VII

BENIZET THE GOATHERD

THE sky grew bright and the hills red with the dawn. Raimbaut would have slept longer, had he not rolled on to a thorn branch, which dispelled his drowsiness most effectually. As he sat up and ruefully rubbed his smarting shoulder, he heard a great splashing of water in the bed of the brook beneath him. Parting the branches, he crept to the edge of the bank, and looking down, saw Benizet's shock of red hair almost within touch.

The goatherd stood in the middle of the stream, girt to the thighs, with the water rushing against his sinewy legs. He was bending over a miniature bridge of seven arches, built with stones from the hillside. He examined each span in turn, then climbed upon the bridge, and, leaping into the air, came down with all his weight on the centre arch, underneath which the water was deepest and the current strongest.

Raimbaut, convulsed with wonder and repressed laughter, expected to see the tall goatherd drop into the brook amid the ruins. But the bridge gave no sign of yielding, and Benizet, satisfied with his test, looked up and saw a pair of curious eyes peering at him through the hawthorn branches. His face flushed angrily, but when he discovered it was Raim-

baut, he greeted him without resentment, and sat down beside him.

"What in the name of all the saints were you trying to do?" inquired Raimbaut. "Are you not busy enough with your goats that you must occupy your time like a child at play?"

"It is not in play that I built this bridge," replied Benizet solemnly.

"Why, what purpose does it serve?" asked Raimbaut, laughingly. "Neither you nor the goats are afraid to wet your feet."

Benizet made no reply, and Raimbaut, accustomed to the silence of the hillside, waited patiently. At last the goatherd spoke, —

"Messire Raimbaut, for a long time I have wished to tell you of a great purpose that has taken hold of me. Will you listen to the end and ask no question, for it is hard for me to talk?"

"Yes," answered Raimbaut, wondering at the restrained earnestness of the goatherd, "no single word will I speak until you have finished."

"As you know," began Benizet, "for it is a tale often told in Vacqueiras, my parents were both drowned many years ago in the Rhone. They were on a pilgrimage to Avignon. I was but a little lad, and can scarce remember them. As you used to dream of falling from the Devil's Tooth, I often dreamt of the cruel Rhone, of the waters rising about me, and I unable to escape or to call aloud. One Easter morning, before sunrise, as I lay asleep

on the hillside, I saw the fatal river, and trembled with the fear of being swept away to death by the fierce current. At the very climax of my horror, there came for the first time to my ears, a faint melody. There was a glimmer in the mist which grew to a bright light, and I saw a bridge spanning the river, against whose wide arches the waters surged in vain. Then above the roar of the torrent I heard a mighty voice which said, — 'Benizet, build thou the bridge!' When I woke I was greatly troubled and asked myself, 'How is it possible for me, a poor goatherd, to accomplish so great a work?' I questioned, 'is it a message from the saints, or a dream which brings no meaning with it?' For a long time I doubted; but again the vision came to me, even plainer than before, and again the voice commanded, 'Benizet, build thou the bridge!' Then I was certain of my duty, and I began to consider how the work could be accomplished. I decided that I must do all that was possible in my poor power, and leave the rest to Heaven. I chose this place, where the brook ran swiftly, and taking stones from the fields, I framed a single arch, which was undermined and carried away in a night. Again I tried, and again the waters triumphed. At each vision I noticed how the stones were laid; and now, at last, I have built a bridge like that of my dreams, against which the brook is powerless. Even the torrent of yesterday could not destroy it. If the little stones resist the small stream, will not huge

rocks be able to stand against the full flood of the Rhone?"

Raimbaut had been so impressed by the goatherd's tale that he listened silently to its very end. He looked with wonder as Benizet rose and faced the sun, a smile on his haggard face, his red hair like a halo. Was he fool or enthusiast? Raimbaut could not decide. He was about to speak, when the goatherd turned toward Avignon, stretched his long arms above his head, and said, —

"The time is come! I go to build the bridge to-day!"

He spoke as calmly as if it were a garden-wall he planned to raise; and Raimbaut asked, —

"How about the flock? Will you leave them to wander on the hillside?"

"I care not," replied the goatherd; "never again shall I tend the goats. Henceforth my labor is for God and man."

With these words Benizet tightened the straw rope he wore around his waist for a girdle, and would have started on the instant, had not Raimbaut caught him by the robe, —

"Wait until to-night, and I will go with you."

"You jest!" said Benizet, looking at him doubtfully. "Your duties are with your master at Courthézon."

"There you are wrong," said Raimbaut. "My mission is not a holy one, but my duties at Courthézon are over. I must make a pilgrimage to save

my neck. You have told your story; now I will tell mine."

He pulled Benizet down on the grass again and related his unfortunate experience at the castle of his over-lord. The shepherd listened intently till Raimbaut finished with his wakening under the thorn-bush by the side of the stream.

"Alas!" said Benizet. "I fear you have acted hastily. Only Guilhem wronged you, and the Count was kind from the beginning. You might yet make your peace with him."

"Truly," replied Raimbaut, "I have no such foolish hope. I have offended my over-lord, and there is nothing left but flight. Neither do I care to return to Courthézon with shoulders bent for punishment. Guilhem shall not have the pleasure of laughing at me. The Count has a strong arm, and I must go far. He will search Vacqueiras first, and may have been there already. I will not involve my poor father in my affairs. I wait only for to-night's darkness, and then I am off to Toulouse. Bernart of Ventadorn has told me, times without number, if ever I were in trouble to come to him. Count Raimon, his master, is a good patron, and I am sure I can find some place at his court. Besides, he has a feud with Count Raimbaut of Courthézon, and will not give me up. My way lies through Avignon. To-night we can depart together, and be companions on the first stage of the journey."

Benizet demurred, being doubtful of his right to

delay his departure even for a few hours, but yielded at last to Raimbaut's entreaty. The matter was hardly settled, when they discovered a clump of spears galloping swiftly along the road. They could hear the hoof-beats of the horses as they clattered up the hill, and the summons of the spokesman at the gate of the village. A gay sight it was, and Raimbaut felt little fear under the shelter of the thorn-bush; for though a scant half mile away, no man in armor could hope to reach him.

The men-at-arms did not take long to examine the castle, and to satisfy themselves that Raimbaut was not within its walls. They then searched the village thoroughly, and at noon rode away, disappearing on the road to Courthézon. Raimbaut did not fail to note, however, that while twelve men rode up, but ten departed; and as he sat with Benizet, sharing his frugal lunch, he decided it would be unsafe for him to visit the castle.

Jacques seemed the best intermediary. Raimbaut waited until late in the afternoon, and then set out to find him. He followed the depression of the hillside, skirting the village, and came at last to a dense clump of willows, which grew close to the old mill. Here he was safe from discovery, although the moss-covered wheel turned slowly close by his elbow, and the spray from the dripping water moistened his hot forehead. In front of him was a little stretch of green lawn, and on it was Jacques, the only person in sight.

The mill was a favorite stopping-place for wandering joglars of the humbler sort, for hither the peasants came and here the villagers congregated. A tumbler could find no better place to show his skill than the lawn in front of the mill-door, where any singer or story-teller could always find an audience.

Before he could speak plainly, Jacques had begun to sing and imitate the gestures of the story-tellers. He tried to repeat the feats of the contortionists when he could scarce toddle, and he grew up as supple as a willow wand. He lost his two front teeth in an effort to duplicate the trick of catching a pewter pot in his mouth. The consequence was that, whenever he smiled, he showed a wide gap; and as his mouth was large, his face mobile and full of expression, he had but to smile in order to win an answering laugh. When he crossed his eyes, over which he had remarkable control, and assumed a look of vacancy, he was able to provoke a roar of laughter which put his audience in good humor before he said a word or sang a note. He was the best liked of all the village lads, and Peirol had done his best to spoil him. It was to Raimbaut, however, Raimbaut the serious, Raimbaut the dreamer, that Jacques gave a devotion like that of a faithful dog. It had long ago been arranged between the boys to go from court to court together, Raimbaut as a troubadour and Jacques a joglar, to sing his songs and tumble for the amusement of the common people.

Since Raimbaut's departure to Courthézon,

Jacques had been indefatigable in his efforts to perfect himself, and as Raimbaut peered through the gaps in the willow branches, he could see the miller's lad practising patiently. He turned hand-springs and cart-wheels without number; he twisted himself like a trout fresh caught from the brook, and performed feats of dexterity that made Raimbaut wonder. After each exploit he bowed gravely to an imaginary audience and said, — "I hope I please you, gracious dames and noble masters."

When Jacques had finished, he came directly to the clump of willows, on a protruding branch of which he had hung his coat.

At Raimbaut's low call, he rushed to him with a cry of joy. He listened with wonder to Raimbaut's story, interrupting again and again with exclamations of admiration, and pledged himself to carry out his orders to the very letter. He could not restrain his amazement at the struggle with the wolf-hound.

"By my faith!" said he; "'t is better than the stories the farmers tell while they wait to have their corn ground. 'T is a marvellous tale, the like of which I have never heard. I would give one of my eyes to have seen Guilhem when he discovered his bed-fellow! I warrant that he raised the castle with his cries, and kept a torch burning until morning."

"Truly," declared Raimbaut, "in spite of my oath, I confess I have neither love nor pity for him; yet now that my anger has left me, I remember I had many

good friends at the castle, and the Count was wondrous kind to me. He made me strange promises, the purport of which I cannot understand. I wish I might be reconciled to him, but after last night, there is nothing for me but flight. Will you come to Toulouse with me?"

"Come with you!" exclaimed Jacques, "I have had no other thought."

"And yet," said Raimbaut, "perhaps I should bid you stay here until I have a little established myself."

"I pray you give me no such command," cried Jacques pleadingly. "Truly I should follow you like the dog whose master says, 'Go home!' but whose love is too great for his obedience."

"Good Jacques, my heart would be sore to leave you. I have learned at Courthézon that, in spite of my vow, charity toward the world does not always win love in return. How soon can you start with me?"

"I am ready now," replied Jacques. "I have only to speak five words in the mill. It is but a few steps to the castle, and I can join you on the hillside within the hour."

"Naught care I to take from Vacqueiras," said Raimbaut, "but my old lute standing in the corner of my room. It is worth its weight in gold. I tried a score of instruments at Courthézon. They were splendid with ivory and silver, yet they gave only faint echoes of the rich tones that come from the mellow chest of the old lute. Whisper to Michonne

that I am well, and on my way to Toulouse; but not a word to any other. I am determined to take my troubles with me, though my heart is sad that I cannot say farewell to Anselme, who is far away, nor receive my father's blessing. You will find me with Benizet by the brook."

"I will bring the lute," replied Jacques, "and will also fetch a purse of money, and a thick mantle. The ravens will not feed you as they did the prophet. Saint Martin, your patron, is long since dead, and none other is likely to share his cloak with you."

Jacques disappeared on his errand, and Raimbaut made his way back to Benizet. It was quite dark when Jacques came stumbling up the hill, breathless with excitement and hurry. He reported that there were two men-at-arms at the castle, but he got the ear of Michonne without difficulty. The good woman had cheerfully given him half the contents of the household purse, and, in the shadows of the courtyard, handed him the lute and the mantle. She sent a message of love to Raimbaut, assuring him that Peirol had not been ill-treated, and bidding him make his way as quickly as possible to Toulouse. She also sent some sweet cakes, which Jacques declared had been plentifully salted with her tears.

"And yet," he said hesitatingly, "I have kept back some dreadful news which I scarce know how to tell you. One of the men-at-arms, whose tongue Michonne loosened with wine, declares that they found the good Count this morning lying on the

floor of his room, cold and dead. His body was twisted with agony and his face drawn and lined with pain. They think he cried out, but at the time the whole castle was disturbed by the discovery of Touche, so that no one heard him. The ill-fated man passed away with no one to minister to him. When the Count's death was announced, all Courthézon was convulsed, and there were cries for 'Berguedan,' at first doubtful, but growing more and more insistent. When the Spaniard did not answer, they sought him long and eagerly. It was the Countess Tyburge, who had taken control of the castle in the name of her son, who at last informed the clamorers that Berguedan had received a message summoning him to Barcelona, and had departed in the cool of the early morning. The sudden disappearance of the Spaniard confirmed suspicions already strong. There are a dozen parties of horsemen following him, and should they catch the villain it will mean a quick death by the roadside."

"Alas!" cried Raimbaut. "It is indeed dreadful news."

"The Countess Tyburge," continued Jacques, "so the man-at-arms said, made no effort to send for you, and your offence was forgotten in the shadow of the great sorrow. It was the little chaplain who urged that you be sought for as well as Berguedan, giving assurances that you should not be punished."

"Truly," said Raimbaut sadly, "I was ungrateful to the good Count, although I loved him. Were

he alive I should return to Courthézon to take any punishment he might mete out to me; yet I am not fool enough to trust myself to the tender mercies of the Countess Tyburge, with Guilhem at her elbow to prompt her."

Jacques' story was a spur to their departure, and they waited only until the twilight had given place to the blackness of the night. Benizet was quite ready, for he owned nothing in the world but his crook and a bag for food. They avoided the village, passing through olive groves and vineyards until they reached the valley, and did not take to the road till they had put a safe distance between themselves and Vacqueiras.

It lacked a few hours of dawn when they came within sight of the scattered lights of Avignon. Making their way across country over the rough furrows, they found a deep crevice where they were hidden from view and sheltered from the night-wind. Rolling themselves up in their mantles, Benizet and Jacques were soon snoring heavily; but Raimbaut was too excited to fall asleep at at once. The peace and sweetness of the little castle of Vacqueiras could be his no longer. He must face the world bravely, hoping for friendship, but prepared for what might come. He was determined to push on to Toulouse, the rosy city of his dreams, of which Bernart had so often spoken. Here he was sure to find happiness.

CHAPTER VIII

BEAUCAIRE

It was almost noon when they left the shelter of the rocks. The day was hot and sultry, and seemed doubly oppressive after the cool shadows. They had not gone far before they came in sight of the river. To Raimbaut and Jacques a bridge across the wide waters seemed as impossible as a thoroughfare to Heaven. They were filled with awe and wonder also at the great city, with its tall towers pointing to the sky. The world seemed very large and very strange. Even Jacques was silent, and Raimbaut was burdened with the thought of parting with Benizet. The goatherd only was cheerful. He bade them farewell as calmly as if it were but for a day.

"Some time," said he to Raimbaut, "the saints will call you to a mission as they have me. I know not what it will be, but the summons will come, for your life has been saved by prayer. Meanwhile, do not doubt the power of the saints, for by their aid I shall build a bridge on which you may cross the Rhone dry-shod."

He lifted his hand in blessing and left them, not once looking back. They watched the gaunt figure descend the hill and pass through the wide gate. When the city had swallowed him up, Raimbaut and

Jacques continued on their way with a strange feeling in their hearts that the goatherd had been taken by the hand of Death. Jacques was the first to regain his spirits.

"There is a good man-at-arms spoiled by a silly fancy," said he. "All his strength is in his body, and of what use will it be to count beads in a monastery? He cannot build the bridge with his own hands, and his halting tongue will not persuade others to help him. I thank the good Lord I have no such foolish ideas in my head! Give me three meals a day, say I, a decent covering for my back, and a shelter for the night. I promise you I will not dream of building bridges, nor of missions from the saints. If to this be added a friend by my side and a song in my throat, I ask nothing more of Heaven."

"And yet," replied Raimbaut, "were there no men on earth but eaters and singers, not much would be accomplished! I pray some day there may come to me a great love and a great ambition, even if they bring trouble with them."

At this idealism Jacques only shrugged his shoulders to show his disagreement, and with a last look at the tall tower of Nostre-Dame-des-Doms they resumed their journey. All the morning they walked steadily southward toward Beaucaire. They met many travellers who told them that the fair was nearly over, and the merchants were taking their diminished stocks to other markets. The boys

learned that the last days were given over to merry-making and revelry, and an old joglar, with whom the boys shared their noon meal, advised them to keep out of Beaucaire. This they resolved to do, but when they reached Tarascon they could find no place to spend the night.

Only a few hundred yards away, across the water, was the fair ground, covered with thousands of plane trees swaying in the wind and bright with the descending sun. The sound of merry voices and the music of many instruments floated over to them, and they could see the crowds hurrying to and fro. Dominating all was the mighty castle itself. The boys forced their way through the dense throng to the river's edge.

The stream was covered with boats loaded almost to sinking, as they crept slowly across to Tarascon and returned, empty, to the other side. The sights and sounds nearly drove Jacques mad with excitement, and he begged Raimbaut to take the first boat.

"Bah!" said he, "we are neither old ladies nor children. I have my dagger and you your long sword, over which you have been tripping ever since you left Vacqueiras. They cannot eat us, and with all this crossing the place will be nearly empty by sunset."

For a long time Raimbaut refused, though Beaucaire had been to him for many years a place of wonder. Beyond the castle were the lists where Peirol had shorn Count des Baux's helmet, "as if it had been the rind of a cheese," and here he had won

the silver drinking-cup with the vine-leaves carven on the bowl. At last Raimbaut decided to cross the river, pass through the fair ground, and leave before dark. The old joglar had warned them that neither purse nor life was safe after nightfall, but the temptation was too great, and Raimbaut hailed a ferryman who was pushing off.

Although they crossed quickly, they had time to study the castle as they approached it, a strong fortress, perched on its mighty rock rising precipitously above the village and the plain. There were trees and gardens inside its walls, and above them all rose a beautiful tower, the angles of which were like none other than Raimbaut had ever seen.

As they neared the opposite shore, they saw that the bank of the river was crowded with people, pushing and elbowing in their eagerness to get a place; and as the keel grated on the beach, there was a mad rush to enter. Raimbaut was lucky enough to get ashore dry-shod, but Jacques was knocked over by a huge bale on the back of a lusty Moor, and landed in the water, wet to the middle. He scrambled out, laughing heartily, shaking himself like a dog. A joke was all the same to Jacques, whether it were on himself or someone else.

"Tell me, Raimbaut," inquired he, as he looked ruefully at his wet clothes, "why do the saints allow a Christian like me to be overthrown by an unbeliever like that blackamoor?"

"Perhaps," replied Raimbaut, "it is because he is

a very good Moor, and you, I know, are a poor Christian."

At this Jacques laughed louder than ever, and they hurried away to avoid a scuffle between two rough merchants, one of whom drew a dagger while the other flourished a pair of gleaming shears.

The booths stretched in long lines underneath the plane trees. It was evident by the frequent gaps that many had been taken down; those still standing had only cheap and gaudy articles for sale.

The boys passed a crowd of drunken men and women seated around a cask of wine. A dirty drab with a flaming face stretched out an inviting hand to Raimbaut, which he declined with such evident perturbation, that the whole mob set up a yell of laughter and derision. Although the fair had its own officers to suppress disorder, the court had dispersed with the formal closing, and the gayer and more turbulent spirits were now given loose rein.

Down the path the lads passed, and had almost reached the open fields, when they came upon some young people dancing merrily under the trees to the music of a red-faced musician. He was sawing fiercely at his viol, and was perched on the roof of a booth so decrepit that it leaned at a crazy angle and threatened every moment to collapse. A very lively party it was, so intoxicated with the joy of living that they needed little inspiration from the wine-cup. They were peasants from the fields, villagers from Tarascon, and varlets from the Castle of Beaucaire.

The girls were young, pretty, and clad in bright colors; they danced with an abandon at which Raimbaut opened his eyes. He watched half-admiringly, half-doubtfully, as they flitted to and fro in the light and shadow thrown by the setting sun and waving branches.

Jacques saw a beckoning hand, and, leaving Raimbaut like an arrow from its bow, he seized a plump damsel and swung gaily into the dance.

For a moment Raimbaut stood alone, and then a young girl approached him coyly and said, —

" Come, my master, are you too fine to be merry with a village lass? "

" Indeed, no," replied Raimbaut, " but the steps of the dance are strange to me, and I would not show my awkwardness before your bright eyes."

" I am sure you are not clumsy," replied the girl looking admiringly at Raimbaut's graceful, well-knit figure.

" Oho! " cried Jacques's partner as she whirled by them, " have at him, ' Little Mouse '! He cannot refuse you."

" Truly I cannot," replied Raimbaut, as he bent over the pretty face which was lifted close to his. The dark hair had been rumpled by the wind, the lips were parted, and the bare brown throat rose and fell under the exertion of the last dance. Raimbaut looked into the dark eyes, brilliant with passion, and his heart beat rapidly as he passed his arm around the slender waist.

He was about to join the dance, humming the swinging tune under his breath, when he caught sight of a knot of ribbon on the girl's shoulder. It was no larger than a red rose, yet as his eyes rested on it he drew back, for well he knew its meaning. His blood urged him on; his soul forbade; and while he hesitated, there emerged from the booth a group of rough men and women engaged in a fierce brawl. With loud oaths and cries of pain and anger, the turbulent tide swept across the path and engulfed Raimbaut and the girl, who, with a cry of terror, clung to him closely. As she did so, Raimbaut felt the pressure on his breast of the Book of Hours, and in an instant he remembered his vow. Even then the flame of desire burned hotly in his veins, and the battle was still in doubt, when his purse was gripped by a strong hand and torn from his girdle.

The thief sprang away before Raimbaut could turn, and would have escaped had it not been for Jacques, who gripped him at his second stride. Raimbaut was almost as quick, and a very necessary ally, for the thief was a huge villain and laid about him lustily. Indeed, he would have beaten them both, had not the crowd interfered, at which he suddenly changed his tactics and cried loudly for help.

"Thieves! Thieves!" he yelled. "Help me, good friends!" ceasing to struggle and holding the purse above his head. He made this appeal just as a caval-

cade came up, at the head of which rode a lady carrying a falcon on her glove. Close behind her was the figure of a man in sombre black, lightened here and there with touches of scarlet. He looked half-priest and half-gallant. There followed knights, squires, and ladies, with servants and men-at-arms, riding westward in the cool of the evening.

"What is the trouble here?" demanded the lady, speaking with authority. She was dressed in dark velvet, a collar of lace at her throat, and sat her large palfrey as squarely as any knight behind her. The boys were too startled to speak quickly, and the man to whom they clung found breath first.

"Listen to me, Ermengarda, most noble Countess," he cried. "I am Antoine, Guilhem of Berguedan's own man. I was passing along the way, when these two desperate young thieves sprang at me, one at my throat and the other at my purse."

"The rogue lies!" cried Jacques.

"The purse is mine," declared Raimbaut. "He tore it from my girdle!"

"Silence! all of you!" commanded the lady. "Speak only in answer to my questions." Then, turning to Raimbaut, she said, — "First tell me who you are, and whence you come."

At this Raimbaut hesitated, and the thief clamored eagerly, —

"Note you that, noble Countess? I am sure you have often seen me with my master. This rascal dares not tell his name. I warrant he is a well-

known thief who has come to ply his trade here on the last days of the fair."

Raimbaut, looking up at the Countess, replied, —

"For good reasons, not because of guilt, I cannot tell my name. What matters it whether it be Guilhem, Pierre, or Philippe, if the purse be mine?"

The Countess frowned.

"You speak too boldly for one who conceals his name. I might condemn you to a thrashing for rudeness, were you guilty of nothing worse."

Raimbaut flushed to the brow.

"In truth, madam," said he, "I am to blame. My only excuse is that I have a whit forgot myself in the excitement of the struggle. I beg that you will pardon me. I ask no fairer judge."

There was a murmur of approval, but the Countess would not be mollified. In another instant she would have condemned Raimbaut and Jacques to a cell in the Castle of Beaucaire, when a demoiselle, who sat her palfrey close to the lady Ermengarda's elbow interposed, —

"My good Countess, I fear we may do a wrong to these boys. Is it not easy to test the truth of what they say? Perhaps this man is as great a liar as his master."

There were sounds of laughter, and the gruff voice of an old knight said, —

"Indeed, Berguedan is a liar beyond compare. The Lady Alazais has touched him close."

"Well, my wise demoiselle," said the Countess,

turning impatiently, " tell us how we shall test the truth between these knaves. Tell us quickly, for I would be at Nismes before dark."

Alazais, who was enveloped in a long cloak with a hood from which her face emerged like a flower, colored a little, but answered the Countess firmly, —

" Let this noisy rascal whisper in Messire Rogier's ear, and the boy into mine, the exact contents of the purse. We will then declare aloud both statements. You shall examine the purse, and the rightful owner it will be easy to discover."

At this there were cries of approval, broken by Messire Rogier's declaration, —

" The test should succeed, if they be not both thieves, which is more than likely. There are no honest men left in Beaucaire to-night."

Antoine blanched a little when the test was proposed, but assented readily, and recovered too quickly to be noticed except by Alazais, who watched him keenly with her blue eyes. Raimbaut was clearly pleased to whisper into the little lady's ear as she bent from her saddle, and she blushed again at the nearness of his lips. The purse was handed to the Countess, and at her nod, Rogier declared, —

"Antoine tells me that the purse contains a small sum of money, the exact amount of which he does not know, for he has made many purchases to-day for his master. He says also that it holds a book, left with him by Berguedan, the name of which he cannot tell, as he has not the gift of reading."

Alazais laughed scornfully. "Indeed, he has a ready wit and nimble fingers. He knows, of course, the purse must hold money. He thinks the lad is poor and imagines it is a small sum. Why he speaks of the book I have no idea, unless he felt its corners with his fingers. The lad is more exact. He tells me that the purse contains twenty deniers and a package of strings for his lute. Open the purse, my good Countess, and give your judgment."

There was dead silence as Ermengarda loosened the string of the little pouch, took from it a small silver box and poured the pieces of money into Rogier's hand, bidding him count them. She opened the little box, which was the size and shape of a small book, and showed the lute-strings folded carefully away where the dampness could not reach them.

"I' faith," said she, "to a musician the strings for his instrument are no less precious than gold itself. He has certainly told the truth."

"He is also right about the money," declared Rogier, "save for a few pieces of copper, which he doubtless had forgotten."

Ermengarda's face softened a little as she said, —

"Here is your purse, my lad, which I return to you with a warning that you speak not so boldly again to those above you."

She then turned to Antoine, whose confidence had left him, and who looked the convicted culprit indeed.

"The Count has a narrow room for you in his castle

at Beaucaire. I shall send you to him with instructions to punish as you deserve."

With these words, the Countess bowed gravely and the cavalcade rode on, leaving Raimbaut and Jacques with Antoine, who was in charge of two sturdy men-at-arms. In spite of the hands twisted in his collar, he turned upon Raimbaut with a furious shower of oaths and threats of dire vengeance which ceased not until he was dragged away.

The dancers and revellers had disappeared like frightened rabbits among the trees, for well they knew the stern justice of Ermengarda and feared that it might include witness as well as criminal.

The boys lingered for a moment, and then hurried on to the open fields across which the cavalcade had already galloped. Jacques was a full ten paces behind, watching something over his shoulder, and Raimbaut turned at last to wait for him. He could see two brightly clad figures standing on the edge of the wood, one of whom waved her hand and beckoned to them.

"Shall we go back?" asked Jacques longingly.

"No!" replied Raimbaut as he swung on his heel and started at a brisk pace.

For a little while Jacques followed, and then fell back again.

"Wait," he begged, "they are both calling to us!"

"I will not," replied Raimbaut.

"Why not go to them?" inquired Jacques pleadingly. "We are neither priests nor monks. What

harm is there in a kiss or two? The girl you had in your arms was beautiful as the springtime."

"She was indeed!" replied Raimbaut, "and so was the woman sent by the demons to tempt Saint Anthony in the desert. I did not know that a wanton, with the mark of her trade showing plainly on her shoulder, could tempt me so nearly to the breaking of my vow."

"At least we can stop to wave our hands to them in farewell," declared Jacques.

But Raimbaut would neither pause nor turn his head, and Jacques noticed that his master's hand clutched the frayed corner of his severed mantle as if it were an amulet to protect him from sin.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROSY CITY

It was mid-afternoon; the sun was a ball of fire, and every red brick in Toulouse was heated as if in a furnace. The yellow Garonne ran lazily around the city walls, and swirled against the base of a tower of Count Raimon's palace. At a wide window of this tower, overlooking the river and the level meadows beyond, sat Bernart of Ventadorn. His head was bare, and his robe open at the throat to tempt a soft breeze that came and went like a capricious woman's favor. His lute was in his hand, and a closely written scroll on a table before him. He touched the instrument lightly and sang in a voice as rich and mellow as an old viol, —

"With gladness am I compassed like a golden wall, —
Why should I from such joyous thraldom seek to 'scape?"

He was not satisfied and sang the words again, slightly changing the melody. Still, they did not please him, and he was patiently working over the stubborn lines which refused to be yoked to music, when there came a knock on the door. He cried out cheerily, "Enter, my friend," but did not look up, so engrossed was he by his task. He repeated the lines until he had them perfect, and then turned to see two dusty, sunburnt boys on the threshold.

For a moment he stared speechless. Then dropping his lute with a crash of discordant notes, he caught Raimbaut in his arms and kissed him on both cheeks.

"'T is my lad of Vacqueiras," he cried, "grown so tall I hardly knew him. And here is Jacques too, with the same sad countenance and no teeth yet sprouted to fill the gap made by the pewter pot. Tell me, my boy, are you able to do the trick you were practising when last I saw you at the mill?"

"Indeed yes," replied Jacques, a broad smile on his face in recognition of his cordial reception. "And I have a dozen more I shall be pleased to show you."

"If you choose, you shall appear this very night before the Count and his guests," declared Bernart. "I will arrange with the seneschal, and he will supply you with everything you need for your performance."

"I will do my best," cried Jacques eagerly, "and I promise not to finish sprawling flat on my back, as you saw me a year ago."

The troubadour gave the boys fruit from the dish which served as prop to his scroll of parchment, pressed Raimbaut into the chair by the window, and inquired about Peirol.

"Alas!" said he, "I hoped to hear better news of my old friend. Now tell me something about yourself. Only yesterday I was speaking of you to my master, and won from him a half-promise that he

would make you his squire, should you come to Toulouse."

As Raimbaut told of his experience at Courthézon, he realized, as he had not done before, that he had been hasty and thoughtless of the Count who had been so kind to him. He doubted that the provocation from Guilhem had been sufficient to excuse his sudden departure, and the tragic death of his over-lord had left him oppressed with sorrow and regret. Yet he told his story without extenuation. Although the troubadour shook his head once or twice doubtfully, at the end he embraced Raimbaut and said, —

"A greybeard might have distinguished between the good Count and his malicious nephew, but I do not see how a lad of spirit could have acted otherwise. I have never liked the pale Tyburge with her furtive looks; and as for Berguedan, I loathe his very presence. When I meet him, I have the same feeling as if I suddenly came upon a serpent in the grass. He is like a snake in more ways than one, and it is not improbable that he knows more about the Count's death than he would choose to tell. There is nothing to connect him with your father's injury, but he is none too good to have struck the treacherous blow."

"We have no clue," declared Raimbaut, "but the little tuft of red roan hair which I always carry with me. I never cease to watch for a horse of this strange color. I believe I shall some time find him

and discover my father's enemy. In spite of my vow to live like Saint Martin in charity with all the world, I do not fail to pray that some time I may avenge the wrong."

"Take the advice of an old man who has seen more than one plan of vengeance miscarry," said Bernart, solemnly. "Trust Heaven to search out the offender and assign a fitting penalty."

"I would not question the power of God," answered Raimbaut, "but since I wasted my little store of silver on tall candles for the church, I sometimes doubt that Heaven troubles itself over-much about the affairs of men."

As Raimbaut spoke, the kindly light went out of his face, the lines of his jaw grew tense, and his eyes became dark and angry. Bernart watched him wonderingly, and then inquired concerning the long journey from Vacqueiras to Toulouse. He listened with great interest to Raimbaut's description of his adventure at Beaucaire.

"So you met the gentle Antoine!" exclaimed Bernart. "I know him well. He was here in Toulouse with his master. He will some day dance gaily at his own death on the end of a hempen cord."

Raimbaut, who had followed the old Roman road, had much to tell about the students at Montpellier and the beautiful city of Carcassonne. At Narbonne he had lingered to watch the tall ships unloading at the piers, and to wonder at the sailors in

their strange costumes who floated over the Mediterranean from the far Levant. Once he had seen the Countess Ermengarda as she walked on a Sunday morning through the " Passage of the Anchor " to the great church of Saint Just.

" Indeed," cried Bernart, " it is lucky she saw you not, for in her own town she assumes more authority than that of the great God Himself. Had she caught you there, you would have been forced to give your name, your history, and your future plans. She is here now, and tells my good master how to put on his shoes, and when to take them off."

" In her presence," declared Jacques, " I feel like a very little dog who meets a big one in the mid-road, and is afraid either to fly or to stand his ground! "

At this both Bernart and Raimbaut laughed, and the latter asked eagerly, —

" Can you tell me anything about the fair demoiselle who befriended me at Beaucaire and rode by the side of the Countess? "

" It seems for all the world like the act of the Lady Alazais, the daughter of my lord," answered Bernart, " though I thought she left Beaucaire a week before you arrived. Rest assured you will some day find the lady, whoever she may be, and perhaps you may sing a song to please her. That reminds me," exclaimed the troubadour, " I have not heard you for near a year. Then your voice was beginning to change, and you were singing treble, alto, tenor, and bass by turns."

"What shall I give you?" asked Raimbaut, laughing at the description of his voice.

"Sing anything you like," replied the troubadour, "if it be not of my own making. By this time you should have written something of your own."

"Alas!" said Raimbaut, "I have not yet been inspired. I heard a new chanson of the Count of Born's at Narbonne and I will do my best with it. A foolish joglar begged him for a fresh song which would make him certain of a welcome wherever he wandered. These are the words the bitter knight sent him."

Raimbaut touched his lute and sang, —

"With strident voice you make pretence of song;
You're like a Moor, so ugly is your face;
You spoil your tale, 't is tedious and too long;
To call you singer would the name disgrace.
Whene'er you smile, you seem but to grimace;
Come not to me lest I should do you wrong!
I send these lines and bid you pass along!"

The troubadour listened critically, his head on one side and his mouth pursed in a judicial fashion. He laughed a little at Bertrand's grim humor, but was plainly more interested in Raimbaut himself, and he congratulated him heartily.

"Your voice is not quite changed. Some will call it tenor and some baritone — and they will both be right. You have temperament enough to give it full expression, and all you need is confidence and practice. Believe me when I say you should become a troubadour beyond compare. Above all things, use

your voice carefully, for a young voice is like a young horse: if too early saddled and hard ridden, it spoils him for a fast race or a long journey. Now for your plans. Raimon's final consent to accept you as his squire depends on how you please him. You already have your sword, and your adventure at Courthézon will not harm you."

"I wish I could be sure of this," declared Raimbaut. "I confess, although I have no regrets concerning the killing of the wolf-hound, I am ashamed that I stayed not to face my over-lord. He was amazingly kind to me, and I have often wondered what was the secret he was prepared to tell. If I thought I might learn about my mother, I would go back to Courthézon, no matter what the danger."

"Tut!" said Bernart. "I believe you will find Toulouse a safer place in which to dwell. Tell me first what is your ambition? Do you choose to be a knight or a troubadour?"

"I am in doubt about many things," replied Raimbaut. "I love most a life of song, yet must I win my golden spurs that I may have the right to meet my father's enemy, and read the secret of the Book of Hours. Stronger than all else there is a desire that there may some time come into my heart a Perfect Love. Of this I often dream, and in search of it my life is a constant quest."

As Raimbaut spoke, his cheeks flushed, his eyes brightened and his face glowed with enthusiasm.

Bernart listened with a smile in which sympathy and amusement were mingled.

" Indeed," said he, " do you hope to accomplish all these things in one short life? I would not take from you the glamour of a single dream, yet I have learned from sad experience how necessary it is to keep one's foot upon the earth, and not trust to wings alone. If you wish to be a knight, you must not stay long at Toulouse. There is no nobleman in the world with such a heritage of glory as Raimon of Toulouse, but a nearly fatal injury in the lists, when he was scarce a man grown, has made it impossible for him to follow the example of his ancestors. It is for this reason that he opposes war except as a last resort, and has set his face against any combat in the lists. He cares not for young men eager to excel in battle and tournament, but loves a youth who can sing his own song with a mellow voice."

" I am afraid," said Raimbaut despairingly, " that I cannot please him, for I have written nothing of my own."

" They will come in good time, I have no doubt," said Bernart encouragingly. " I believe the Count will accept you, and that if you dwell here with me, it will not be long before you become a finder of song. You must know that this is called the Tower of Nightingales, for rarely is it without the sound of melody. There are four squires who will be your companions, every one of whom will some day be famous; and with them at hand Count Raimon never lacks a

good singer nor a new song. They have all taken to the field, falcon on wrist, but to-night they will return. This reminds me that I must finish the new chanson I am planning to sing after supper. With the Countess Ermengarda as a listener, I must be doubly careful in my preparation, for she is a critic who possesses a sharp tongue, and is not afraid to use it. She has a keen scent for a false note or a weak metaphor, and can follow a plagiarism as unerringly as my master's best hound pursues a red deer to its death. She has an aggravating manner when she turns her head and says, — 'Well done, my dear Bernart! A good idea and well expressed; but Jaufré Rudel had the same thought some twenty years ago, and told it better.' "

The troubadour had barely taken his lute in his hand when there was a great clatter, and Raimbaut, rushing to the window, looked down upon a crowd of knights, ladies, squires, pages, and varlets. Horses were being led to the stables, and dogs were yelping and dodging between their heels. From the kitchen came the odor of meats browning on the spits, and savory dishes simmering in the kettles. Everybody was talking who was not laughing, and some were doing both at the same time. Here a wager was being settled, the loser declaring loudly that he still believed his was the better bird, as he would prove at the next meeting.

Raimbaut was lost in wonder and admiration at the restless throng with its bright colors, its gaiety,

and its abandon. He did not hear the sound of hurrying footsteps, and did not turn from the window, until the door swung open, and a young squire, slamming it quickly behind him, placed his shoulder against it. For a full minute he held the door in spite of repeated assaults upon it, and when he was forced back, three other squires came surging through like water over a broken dam. As soon as Raimbaut was discovered, some degree of decorum prevailed, and Bernart, with an assumption of great courtliness, said, —

"Messire Raimbaut of Vacqueiras, these four subdued gentlemen are squires of Count Raimon, who dwell with me in this tower. Allow me to introduce to you, first, Messire Bonifaz of Monferrat. He is as brave as Ronald, and comes to Toulouse to perfect himself in the manners of a refined court, yet sometimes he turns restive and rides away to a 'man's game of breaking lances.'"

"Yes," interrupted a tall young man, dark and handsome, "Messire Bonifaz shows how little he has learned of manners by the way he rushes up the stairs, and keeps his betters waiting on the landing."

As Bernart spoke, Bonifaz greeted Raimbaut so cordially that the latter's heart went out to him as did David's to Jonathan. There flashed upon the lonely lad from Vacqueiras the certainty that he had found at last the comrade for whom his heart had long been hungering.

Scarcely as tall as Raimbaut, Bonifaz had the

chest and shoulders of an Ajax. His face, with its stern, irregular features, was bright with the light of friendliness, and their meeting was like the coming together of companions long separated.

"I will next introduce Messire Folquet from Marseille," continued Bernart. "He is our best scholar. He reads many languages, pores over old volumes, and talks seldom; also, he has an over-active conscience, which is forever asking whether an action be right or wrong. He sings better than Bonifaz, and he writes songs as polished as those of Daniel himself."

"It is all very true," declared Bonifaz, "and he never is a half-tone flat, an offence of which I am often guilty."

"And yet," interposed the tall young squire again, "this same Folquet will be naught but a carpet-knight, for he wears armor as if it were a burden, and he is afraid he will cut himself with the edge of his own sword."

"And here," said Bernart, "is the retiring young gentleman who has twice interrupted me — Messire Miraval. He knows less than Folquet, but talks twice as much. He makes not as good songs, but more of them. He will sit him down and for a wager rhyme you off a hundred fair lines within the hour. He pretends he cares not for the Gay Science, and laughs at others when they sing; but practises in secret. He borrows money, and when he needs a horse, saddles that of his neighbor.

He has his love-affairs, and thinks all women desire him."

Although Bernart spoke so directly, and with not a little sting to his words, Messire Miraval was not the least disconcerted as he saluted Raimbaut with an air of graceful patronage. It was evident enough that he was not a favorite with the old troubadour, and yet Raimbaut was quite prepared to like him.

"Youngest of all is Guilhem from Cabestaing. His lord is the surly Count of Roussillon, and Guilhem's castle looks out over the marshes to the blue Mediterranean. He is our best singer. When his companions disagree, it is Guilhem who acts as peacemaker. He has just been given his sword, of which he is very proud, and which is nearly as tall as himself."

Although his home was under the shadow of the Pyrenees, Guilhem's face was fair and his eyes as blue as the sky. He was a chubby lad, who, with his first smile, found a place in Raimbaut's heart.

"Alas!" exclaimed Bernart, 'I almost forgot to introduce my good friend Jacques, 'Knight of the Mill,' the best tumbler in all Provence. I would rather have his supple body than the voice of the finest singer of you all."

Jacques received a cordial welcome from all but Miraval, who did not fail to show that introduction to a joglar was distasteful to him."

"And now," declared Bernart, "it is time to prepare for supper. I am reminded that Messire

Raimbaut has nothing but the clothes he wears, having travelled faster than his store of apparel. I have known an ill-fitting tunic to spoil a good song, and a nice taste in color to make the reputation of a poor singer. I do not intend to present Raimbaut to our master to-night; yet even if he sits at the table of the travellers, he cannot appear like this."

Hereupon all the squires were eager in their proffers and Raimbaut was free to choose what he would. It was evident enough that Guilhem's clothes were too small, and Miraval's too long. Bonifaz settled the matter by rushing upstairs and returning almost immediately.

"Is it not fortunate!" he cried. "I have here a costume which the careless tailor made too tight for me. I can never wear it, and I am sure it will fit Messire Raimbaut as well as if it were cut for him."

He laid on the couch a robe of straw-colored linen from Bruges, with breeches to match and silk stockings of the same shade. The tunic was of darker samite, embroidered at wrist and hem with golden threads, and cut in a pattern of arabesque, through which the lighter shade of the robe could be plainly seen. The mantle was a golden brown of soft woollen stuff, fastened at the throat by a carved button. Raimbaut had never possessed anything half so beautiful. When the squires had hurried to their rooms overhead, he removed the stains of travel, and dressed with Jacques' assistance and Bernart's

advice. The latter suggested some changes which could be made by the tailor, but the costume suited Raimbaut wonderfully well, and he felt like a prince.

Bernart was busying himself with his own wardrobe, taking infinite pains with each article of clothing, when he saw Raimbaut hang his mantle on the wall and draw his dagger.

"No! No!" exclaimed the troubadour. "You would not spoil this beautiful garment? Keep the spirit of your vow, but do not mutilate the gift of Bonifaz."

"I must," replied Raimbaut. "I have sworn to wear always a severed mantle, to remind me that I must live a life of purity and love, like good Saint Martin."

"And yet," declared Bernart, "it is only the good living that is important. Believe me, you will appear uncouth here in Toulouse where vows are held lightly if they be not made to some fair lady."

At this Raimbaut was greatly troubled, and for a long time he stood by the window looking out over the river. His thoughts were far away with Peirol, sitting sullen and solitary in the castle of Vacqueiras, and with Anselme on his knees before the altar. He saw a lad clinging to the bending branches on the sharp crag of the Devil's Tooth. Every thought, every emotion came back to him: he heard the voice of the good priest, and he remembered every word of his vow as he slashed his rough mantle from collar to hem with his dagger. When at last he turned to the trouba-

dour, his face shone as one who had seen a vision. His voice was very calm, but full of suppressed emotion as he said, —

" I would not seem ungracious, yet I must sever a piece from this mantle, for the sake of my soul's salvation. I can do naught else."

CHAPTER X

A MEADOW LARK

THE seneschal drew a long breath of relief, for his evening's task was nearly completed; and he was looking forward to a quiet bottle in his own snug room. He had seen many processions of well-filled dishes march in from the kitchen, and retreat a little later in dire disorder. From the roast venison with sauce *poivrade* to the last course of pastry and confectionery, everything had received commendation. The seneschal had known that the wild boar was a trifle tough, and he had been fearful that the overripeness of the peacocks would be discovered. He had escaped blame, however, for the guests had been too hungry to find fault with the boar, which came early, and the peacocks had been skilfully doctored with a dressing warranted to disguise any flavor but its own.

The guests were contentedly munching their hot cloves and sugared ginger, inciting them to frequent visits to the goblets by their elbows, and the seneschal, standing behind his master's chair, twirled his thumbs over his round paunch, well-satisfied, and at peace with all the world.

It was a famous room, this great hall built of hewn stones quarried in the Pyrenees. It was large enough to hold with comfort three hundred guests. The

groined ceiling was supported by high arches which gave it an air of grace and dignity, and the pavement of mosaic was strewn with flowers. Most beautiful of all were the rare tapestries of Poitou, on which were pictured the deeds of Ronald, ending with his death at Roncesvalles. On the walls were hung many noble weapons and pieces of armor. In the place of honor were the swords of Raimon's four predecessors, Guilhem IV, Raimon IV, Bertran, and Alfonse-Jourdain, who had all fought with the Cross upon their breasts.

In other castles the breeze might filter through narrow embrasures, but here at Toulouse the broad river was ample protection, and there was plenty of air coming through the wide-latticed windows which looked out over the water.

That hour had now arrived which Raimon loved best of the twenty-four, the hour when he could gaze down the long hall and catch the eye of this or that man ready with a good song or a clever story.

The Count's table was on a low dais which lifted it above the level of the floor where sat the retainers and less important guests. The squires had a small table so near that of their master that they could assist him whenever he was in need of their services. Musicians had been playing intermittently throughout the supper, but at a signal from the seneschal they now laid their instruments aside. The silence was broken only by the footsteps of the varlets disappearing with the dishes, and the strident words of Ermen-

garda. She was speaking with much authority to the Count in praise of Daniel.

"He is unquestionably our greatest singer. Anybody can make simple verse inspired by sentiment, but when a man gives you major and minor rhymes in every line, not one word of which he really believes, then you have something worth while!"

The good Count listened with a ghost of a smile on his pale face. He was too wise to start an argument with the Countess, though he quite disagreed with her. His features were finely chiselled, his face was fair, his eyes blue, and his dark hair touched with gray over the temples. Slight was he and small, although he sat on his high fauteuil with a dignity which concealed his lack of stature. The richest ruler in Christendom, his love was for the beautiful. Indeed, the hand which played listlessly with a scroll on the table had not the strength to wield a sword.

A strange contrast was his companion. Though the Countess Ermengarda was a delver in books, a kind patron of the Gay Science, and no mean judge of songs and singers, she had the figure of a peasant-woman who labores all day among the vines, and the complexion of one who cuts wheat on the hillside. The dark hair, carelessly arranged, was plentifully streaked with gray, and Time had set tell-tale wrinkles in her face. Only her eyes were beautiful.

At Raimon's left was seated the blonde Countess of Polignac. To her belonged the loveliness which comes to the flower for a single day when every

petal is at its best. Neither too young for experience, nor too old for ardor, she was talking under her breath to the handsome Bishop of Saint Sernin, confident of her charms which were so lavishly displayed.

Her husband, the fierce Count Heraclius, had been placed between Ermengarda and Alazais. He was doing his best to make himself agreeable to the latter. His black beard was closely trimmed, and his hair had received far more attention than that of the Countess of Narbonne. About his temples, however, were the bare patches showing the marks of his helmet; and try as he might to soften his tones, his voice was harsh and discordant. He was telling a story, half-jocular, half-malicious, about the Countess and a designing joglar, and Alazais could not restrain her smiles, little as she approved either the tale or its teller.

It was not often that the pretty demoiselle allowed herself to laugh, for she took life seriously. Her mother being a Queen, and her father the most powerful noble of Southern France, her life had been surrounded with luxury and adulation. It had not spoiled her, however, but left her calmly conscious of her obligation toward herself and toward the world about her. She could not speak thoughtlessly nor act lightly, as could a maiden of lesser degree. Barely sixteen years old, and newly betrothed to the Count of Beziers, she looked forward contentedly to a marriage of state. Inheriting her

father's transparent complexion, she was like a white rosebud on which the dew glistened. Her eyes were bright and her hair like spun gold.

Bernart sat at the corner of the table where he could catch his lord's eye, and see each singer as he approached. He was also in a position whence he could watch the tumbling and the sleight-of-hand of the joglars. To this little attention was paid by the guests of noble blood, the space allotted for these performances being closer to the centre of the long table, where sat the men-at-arms, the servitors, and those of low degree.

Bernart did not fail to notice when a round-faced little joglar appeared, clad in the robe of a mendicant friar. He wore a grey beard so false that it made no attempt to deceive. When he entered, he pretended to trip over his long gown and fell sprawling on the floor. Then, rising to his feet, he rubbed his elbow ruefully, and began to examine with great anxiety the basket of eggs which he carried on his arm. Finding none of them were broken, the expression of solicitude on his face gave place to a broad smile which revealed the loss of two front teeth. So cleverly had he acted his part, that he had already caught the attention of his audience; so contagious was the smile that it won the good-will of every one, and the applause was loud and the laughter hearty. Then the little friar, growing serious, took egg after egg from his basket and pretended to swallow them, after which he seemed to

draw from between his lips five eggs, which he put carefully back in the basket. Next appeared a small chicken, followed by a full-grown hen which flapped her wings and flew down the hall toward the open door, clucking frantically. At the appearance of the chicken, the friar feigned surprise, followed by fear at the loud noise of the hen; but when he drew forth with great difficulty a lean black cat, he gave a cry of horror. He started to run, tripped, and fell at the third step.

For a moment only he lay on the floor, and when he rose, he had discarded the brown habit and appeared, like a butterfly from its chrysalis, clad in a parti-colored costume of red and yellow, which revealed the lithe figure and the supple limbs of Jacques.

Then, bowing right and left to his audience in acknowledgement of the applause, he tossed all the eggs from the basket until the whole five were rising and falling, caught deftly, and sent again and again on their continuous flight. Last of all, he discarded his tunic, and gave an exhibition of tumbling which was without flaw. There seemed no feat of agility too difficult for the pliant young body. When he finished his performance, Jacques of the Mill had won his reputation as a joglar of the first rank. As he stood bowing and smiling, he received a shower of coins which jingled merrily about him, and when he retired, the basket on his arm was heavy with the largess which he had won. The squires had joined loudly in the applause, and Bonifaz had thrown a

silver coin half the length of the hall straight into Jacques's waiting palm.

After Jacques had made his last low bow, many of the servitors and men-at-arms took their departure. With the noise of their retreating footsteps there was a lull in the conversation at the Count's table. In the silence that followed, Raimon bent forward and addressed Heraclius, —

" Come, my dear Count, I know your voice has not lost its melody, nor your hand its cunning. Will you be the next to sing for us? "

There was a little flutter of anticipation, all eyes being turned to the Count of Polignac, but he shook his head.

" You have heard my only song a dozen times. If you were not too polite to tell the truth, you would confess yourself as weary of this as of the songs with which Bernart has lulled you to sleep every night for a score of years. Even lyrics of these fine lads, your squires, must have somewhat lost their flavor. In verity, what you and all the world desire is a new song and a fresh voice."

At this rough speech, so characteristic of Heraclius, the squires were plainly nettled, and even Bernart's cheek flushed. Well did the Count of Polignac know how to find the joints in a man's armor of self-love! Only Raimon seemed quite unmoved, as he replied with a quiet smile, —

" You speak heresy, my brave Count. We believe here in Toulouse that a fully ripened voice is like

matured wine: rawness has disappeared and aroma has become perfect with age. A good song is like a diamond, which neither wears out nor dims with time."

"And yet," answered Bernart, speaking formally and with a low bow, "perhaps we can gratify the wish for variety. I have with me to-night the son of an old friend, whose voice you have never heard. He sang for me this afternoon a song of the Count of Born which I am sure is new to you. I can furnish the fresh voice and the new song. Though the lad is not accustomed to so large an audience, I will run the risk of failure. Will you excuse his simple manner and untrained voice for the sake of novelty?"

There were cries of assent, whereupon Raimon, who had enjoyed the encounter of wit between Heraclius and Bernart, turned to the former with a smile and asked,—

"What say you? Shall we try the lad?"

"'T is seldom that a green archer hits the shield at his first attempt," replied Heraclius gruffly. "Yet anything is better than Bernart's songs and mine."

Raimbaut, seated next Jacques close by the door, had been unable either to see or hear much at the high table. All the evening he had been absent-minded and abstracted. It was only when Raimon began to speak that he understood a word, and when Bernart beckoned to him, he rose mechanically, stunned at the unexpected summons. Usually ready and self-possessed, he never knew how he reached the open space by the hearth. His first conscious moment was

when Jacques, who had hurried to Bernart's room, returned with the lute, and placed it in his listless hand. Yet he bowed not ungracefully when presented as " Raimbaut of Vacqueiras, son of Peirol."

At this a hum of interest ran through the hall. Peirol was known throughout Provence, and loved for his courage and high spirits. Those were very friendly faces that turned towards Raimbaut as he stood alone, his graceful figure framed by the carved stone-work of the mantel. Yet he had not recovered from his surprise or regained his self-possession. His confusion made him an object of sympathy to all but Heraclius.

" It is unfortunate," said the knight, " that the boy lacks courage, the only good quality which his father ever possessed. He looks like a bird, fresh-caged, that can only open his mouth, but cannot sing."

The Count spoke with a sneer on his face and a tone of mockery in his voice, which he expected would increase the boy's shyness. At the challenge, however, there came a transformation over Raimbaut. The knight of Polignac had all unwittingly furnished the only spur that could put motion into Raimbaut's numb spirit. He recovered himself on the instant, and, looking straight into the Count's hawk-like eyes, struck one bold staccato chord on his lute, and began to sing.

At the first note Count Raimon straightened himself in his seat, Ermengarda began to nod her head approvingly, and every knight and lady listened

intently until the last note died away. Although the voice lacked training, it was rich and sympathetic; it held every one as with a spell. The applause which followed was loud and hearty. There were calls for more; the demand was so unmistakable that Count Raimon, after a few words of praise, asked for another song.

Then Raimbaut gave them a chanson which Bernart had sung to him long ago, when he lay ill with a fever in his room at Vacqueiras. It was the song of a brook, a simple thing of two-score lines only. Bernart had sung it over and over, finding it soothed the little fellow tossing on his hot pillow. Through some freak of memory, it came back to Raimbaut to-night. It was full of the ripple of cool waters through meadow grasses and bending reeds. Raimbaut sang it so softly that every one held his breath, and it was called for again and again.

As the boy stood, his face flushed with excitement, on the very wave of success, it occurred to Bernart that he could find no better time to arrange a place for him at the good Count's court; so he spoke up boldly in a lull of the applause.

"If my lord pardon me, I will remind him that this is the lad concerning whom I won a half-promise that he should be made a squire. He has a wonderful knowledge of the songs of Provence and his voice will improve under my training. Though he has not yet found any verse of his own, I have no doubt he will soon do so, for he has imagination,

and has been taught by a learned priest. I hope he has won my lord's favor and that he may be granted the petition which he joins me in presenting."

Bernart made the request with a confidence based on a thorough understanding of his master's mind. The latter was about to give his assent, when Ermengarda, who had all along looked with unfriendly eyes upon Raimbaut, interposed: —

"The lad has shown us a handsome face and a sweet voice, but has given no proof that he will ever be a troubadour. To win a place so close to the greatest patron of the art to which we are all devoted, he should first find a song of his own."

At this unexpected opposition, Bernart flushed with anger. He was about to speak when Heraclius, who was in an ugly mood, added, —

"The Countess is right. Here are Messires Bonifaz, Miraval, Folquet and Guilhem, any one of whom could write for us three-score fair lines within the hour. If this lad who has wandered down from the rocks of Vacqueiras would win a place by their side, let him, in the name of the Gay Science, show us something to prove his worth. What think you, Alazais? It will not be long before the troubadours of Provence will be choosing so fair a chatelaine for their Lady-of-Praise."

"The boy should certainly be given some test," replied Alazais, "yet he is weary with travel, and

has had no time for preparation. Let him sing for us later, when he has become accustomed to his surroundings and has acquired confidence."

"Confidence, say you!" exclaimed Ermengarda. "This is the same lad we met at Beaucaire. Marry! He has assurance enough! We need make no allowances for his embarassment. Let him sing for us a song of his own making! How many lines shall it be? Shall we say sixty?"

Bonifaz, whose sympathy was strongly with Raimbaut, said, —

"No one of us, save Miraval, could write the sixty lines. The test is certainly beyond my powers."

"Indeed," declared Count Raimon, to whom the little controversy was vastly interesting, "the matter of choosing my squire seems to be taken completely out of my hands. I thank you all. May I suggest that we dignify the affair by a formal test, leaving the decision to the Countess Ermengarda and my daughter Alazais? Yet as these ladies have already shown signs of prejudice, shall we not ask the fair Countess of Polignac to sit with them in judgment?"

This suggestion was received with great enthusiasm. Ermengarda, taking the initiative as if by right, turned patronizingly to Raimbaut and said, —

"How old are you, my lad?"

All this time Raimbaut had listened attentively, looking from one speaker to the other, his fate hang-

ing in the balance. He met Heraclius' stern glance with a challenge in the firm lines of his mouth. He smiled faintly at Ermengarda's evident dislike. But when Alazais spoke, and he recognized the demoiselle who had protected him at Beaucaire, there came into his eyes an expression of intense devotion. His confusion had quite left him, and to the inquiry of Ermengarda, he answered readily, —

"I shall be seventeen years old next Eastertide."

"We will call it sixteen then," said Ermengarda, smiling whimsically. "Like many other ladies, I have long ago given up the youthful habit of forestalling time by speaking of my next birthday. Sixteen years of age," continued Ermengarda thoughtfully. "Shall we command him to write a line for each year of his life — sixteen lines in good Provençal, in which there shall be inherent proof that they have been made for this occasion?"

"Let us be kind to him," remarked Heraclius. "Give him but fourteen."

"Very well," replied Ermengarda, "and how long a time shall we allot for the task? Will a quarter-hour be sufficient? What say you, Alazais?"

"I think it much too short a time," replied the demoiselle. "We should grant him a full hour, if we expect anything more than empty rhymes. You must decide this matter, my sweet Bellisenda. Indeed, it is time we referred to you, who have scarcely spoken a word."

The Countess of Polignac started rather guiltily,

and leaned back in her chair. Her eyes had been wandering, half-admiringly, half-caressingly, from Raimbaut's flushed face to his graceful well-knit figure. Her composure was tested when she realized that the Bishop at her elbow was watching her with an expression of amusement on his handsome countenance.

"It is a good old proverb," said she, "'When in doubt, take the mid-road.' I decide that he shall have a half-hour, to be measured fairly by Messire Folquet on the water-clock. Messire Bonifaz, who seems friendly, shall show him the table in the far corner, giving him a piece of parchment on which to write the lines."

"The task is far too easy," declared Ermengarda. "Will you undertake it?"

"Gladly," answered Raimbaut, "and admit the test to be a fair one, even though I fail in its accomplishment. I have never yet found a single line of my own; yet with the inspiration of judges so fair and noble, I shall succeed, if the saints fail me not."

He made a low bow and was escorted by Bonifaz to a quiet corner, where he was left alone with encouraging words. Raimbaut's heart was full of conflicting emotions. He felt like the "fresh-caged bird" to which Heraclius had compared him. It flashed upon him like a revelation that he could have no better motive than this on which to base his song. He dipped his pen in the ink, hummed a tune which the

peasants sang in the vineyards near Vacqueiras and began, —

"A meadow lark, rough-handled in the snare,
Was prisoned in a cage and bade to sing."

Clearly the comparison was plain enough to avoid any accusation of plagiarism! Then the words came tumbling over themselves and Raimbaut's face flushed with the joy of his first composition. He wrote rapidly, almost feverishly, and captured eight lines very quickly. Again he wrote until he had sixteen. He now realized that Heraclius, in shortening his task, had made it more difficult, for he was obliged to change his rhymes. It was unwise to risk failure by excess, and he disposed of the two superfluous lines just as Bonifaz appeared. At sight of Raimbaut's face, the friendly squire exclaimed, —

"Good! I knew you would succeed! I have wagered my best hawk with Miraval, and stand to win five deniers from Heraclius."

When Raimbaut reappeared and took his place before the mantel, every whisper ceased, and every eye was turned expectantly upon him. He waited until he received a friendly nod from Count Raimon, and then sang his fourteen lines, —

"A meadow lark, rough-handled in the snare,
Was prisoned in a cage and bade to sing;
But all day long he fought against the ring
Of stubborn steel that barred him from the air.

All silent was he in his black despair,
Until there came to him a thought of Spring,
The memory of a day his buoyant wing
Had brushed a rose fragrant beyond compare.

Then, dumb no longer, careless of his plight,
Forgetful of his jailor's rancorous voice
And straightened cell, he could not but rejoice,
And clearly sang, atremble with delight:
So sing I now, — though mute a little space, —
Remembering my lady's flower-like face."

When he finished he handed the manuscript to the Countess Bellisenda. She had not failed to notice the blush on the cheek of Alazais, when Raimbaut read the line, " Remembering my lady's flower-like face." She scanned the scroll carefully and passed it to Alazais, who glanced at it approvingly and gave it to Ermengarda. It was evident that the last inspection was to be much more critical than its predecessors. Ermengarda knit her brows and pursed her mouth, and read every word of the little poem once, and twice, and thrice, before she laid it on the table. Count Raimon, to whom the whole affair had been a source of the keenest enjoyment, broke the silence which had become almost painful.

" Well, my fair cousin of Narbonne, what is your verdict? Has the boy performed his task?"

She hesitated for a moment, and then replied, —

" Here are the fourteen lines which point, pat enough, to himself and us. The rhymes are perfect, but then, they are very simple. The phrases are cramped, the words are feeble, and the sentiment

silly and vapid. Certainly, with this verse before me, I would not impose him upon you as your squire."

"My sweet daughter," said the Count, turning to Alazais, "do you agree with the Countess Ermengarda?"

"I do not," answered the demoiselle. "While I have not the erudition of the Countess and cannot speak with her authority as a critic, still I must give my judgment, such as it is. To my mind, Messire Raimbaut has fulfilled his obligation to the letter."

At this there was a hum of excitement. Bernart, who had been in an agony of uncertainty for the last half-hour, turned appealingly to Bellisenda, and the Count, who was watching his wife from under beetling brows, muttered, —

"The lad is too handsome for her to decide against him."

"Well, my beautiful Countess," said Raimon, "you must decide this very important question, concerning which there is a disagreement. What is your judgment?"'

"It is certainly a very awkward form of verse," she declared, "the like of which I have never seen. Yet there seems to be a very pretty sentiment in it; and when we consider the circumstances under which it is written, I think the boy has passed the ordeal with honor."

There followed hearty applause, louder than all else being the cry of Bonifaz. Bernart embraced

Raimbaut again and again, only Heraclius failing to congratulate him, and even Ermengarda was carried away by the enthusiasm, and expressed pleasure that her own judgment had been overruled.

When at last there came a moment of silence, Count Raimon filled a goblet with his own hand and, lifting it high above his head, cried out, —

"Let us drink to my new squire, Raimbaut of Vacqueiras!"

CHAPTER XI

BONIFAZ OF MONFERRAT

When Raimbaut awoke on his first morning in Toulouse, the bell was already ringing for early Mass. Bernart still slumbered peacefully, and Raimbaut dressed as quietly as possible and stole downstairs into the courtyard. In the farther corner was the chapel; and through its wide doorway the inhabitants of the palace were hurrying. As Raimbaut entered, he was greeted on all sides with friendly looks; Alazais smiled at him, and the Countess Bellisenda beckoned him to a place by her side.

The chapel was very beautiful; the walls were adorned with frescoes, and the stained-glass windows bright with all the colors of the rainbow. The altar was of Italian marble, and the little crucifix upon it of pure gold. The priest was clad in a rich chasuble, the orphreys being covered with the skilled embroidery of devout fingers. Even the incense which came from the swinging censer had the spirit of the East in its rare odor, and the tones of the organ were like a dream of Heaven. Everything appealed to Raimbaut's love of the beautiful, as well to his religious feeling. When the voice of the priest rose in the chant, it was almost as sonorous as a note of the organ itself. Raimbaut fell on his knees in an ecstasy of devotion. He did not notice that the Lady Bellisenda

knelt so close to his side that her shoulder pressed against his own, and the fragrance of her silken garments was about him.

When the Mass was over, he rose from his knees with a long sigh, and gave the Countess his hand to assist her to rise from the cold stones. The boy wondered a little at the pressure of the clinging fingers, and the nearness of the red lips when the lady looked into his face and thanked him. They walked together into the hall for breakfast, and when Raimbaut left her at the high table, she said, —

" Count Raimon has promised to have you squire me this afternoon at the falconing. Mind you do not fail me! "

" Indeed, no! " answered Raimbaut, looking admiringly into the alluring face, " I could not forget so fair a fortune."

The first day at Toulouse was crowded with incidents. Most of all Raimbaut remembered it as the day on which he pledged himself to Bonifaz as friend and comrade. The Count of Monferrat was a serious youth, with a face almost stern in its earnestness. The shadow of the Crusades was over him, for his elder brother had died in the Holy Land, fighting for the Cross of his Lord. Although Bonifaz had been sent from his home in Piedmont to learn manners at the most polished court of Europe, he never forgot his ambition to become a perfect Christian knight.

They went together to the tilt-yard, a corner of which had been assigned to the squires for their exer-

cises. Here they found Miraval, Folquet and Guilhem lying on the grass, and breathing heavily, for they had just finished a running-match which Folquet had won easily.

"By my faith," declared Miraval, resentfully, "it is a bad sign when one who aspires to knighthood shows such capacity for flight."

At this Folquet flushed indignantly, —

"As you know, I have no ambition to be a knight, though I have not yet been able to escape from the decree that binds me to distasteful tasks. In running and in leaping, I am better than you all. Little wonder is it that I am not skilful with the sword and lance, which I detest!"

When Raimbaut looked inquiringly at Bonifaz, the latter whispered, —

"You must know that Folquet wishes to be a monk, but as he is an only son, his father will not consent to his retirement from the world. They will never make a knight of him in anything but name, and he will some day reach the shelter of the cloister, toward which his heart turns."

The tilt-yard was a large enclosure, and often had it been crowded in the old days before Count Raimon had received his hurt. The seats which had been graced by throngs of exquisite ladies, were now weather-worn and unsightly, the barriers were leaning, and the ground over which the iron-shod destriers thundered, had become a sea of waving grass. It was melancholy and vacant, but the squires thought

not of this as they struggled together for the glory of winning, or to avoid a dishonorable defeat. In the many contests of skill and strength Raimbaut did not fail to distinguish himself, although he was no match for Bonifaz in wrestling, nor for Folquet in running. With the sword, he was master of them all. Miraval was a little angered to discover that Raimbaut could reach him at will, and get away without a touch. Even Bonifaz was at his mercy, and declared he had never met Raimbaut's equal, save a great master-of-fence from whom he had taken lessons in Genoa.

At last they all had enough and went for a swim in the river, — Miraval, Folquet and Guilhem to a shelving beach, Bonifaz and Raimbaut where they could find the deep water. While they were dressing, Raimbaut noticed a medallion with a gold chain which his friend had hung carefully on a low branch. As it swayed to and fro in the breeze, he caught sight of a miniature upon the ivory disk, framed in a richly carven band of gold. It was the work of a skilful artist and seemed hardly a picture, but a real face that looked out between the green leaves.

"Who is it?" asked Raimbaut wonderingly. "I have seen only one other portrait so beautiful."

"It is my sister Biatritz. I wear her likeness on my heart, for I have never yet found a demoiselle to compare with her."

"It is not alone at the loveliness of the face I

wonder," declared Raimbaut. "Why is it so like a picture that I carry always on my breast?"

He took the Book of Hours from the pocket of his tunic, and opening it at the first miniature, pointed to Saint Love, standing pure and beatific in her niche. At sight of it, Bonifaz gave an exclamation of surprise and bewilderment.

"It is none else than the face of my sister Biatritz! What is the artist's name? He must have seen her!"

"It is not possible," replied Raimbaut. "These are the portraits of three women loved long ago by a noble troubadour. The Saint Faith, in the robe of old rose, is the Countess Ermengarda when she was young. She was even then scarcely beautiful. The Saint Hope, with eyes lifted heavenward and a lute in her hand, is the Countess of Dia. It is easy to understand how one so lovely could write 'Why comes the dawn so soon?' Of the Saint Love I can only tell you that she was a fair demoiselle who dwelt in Italy, and is long since dead. This Saint Love seems to me most beautiful of all. From the first moment I looked upon her, she has had strange influence over me. When I dream of a Perfect Love, it is this face and figure I see. Sometimes I find myself speaking aloud to her the thoughts that are in my heart. I often pray that my quest may some time bring me to her feet."

"May your prayer be granted!" said Bonifaz heartily. "I fear there is little romance in my

soul. Truly, I care more for a good horse than the most fascinating woman who troubles me with her smiles. Shall I tell you something about Biatritz? If we are to be brothers-in-arms, she must be your sister as well as mine."

"I could find no nobler brother, and no sister half so lovely," replied Raimbaut.

"She is a little demoiselle scarce twelve years old," began Bonifaz, "yet is she queen over all the Monferrata. Young as she is, I would rather endure my father's fiercest anger than a look of reproach from her. I would not part with her least smile to win my golden spurs. Since I bade her farewell at the Castle of the Vale among the hills of Piedmont, I have never ceased longing to hold her in my arms again. Like you, she is full of fancies. She chose a little garden in the corner of the walls where I built her a bower covered with roses, which she calls her Arbor of Dreams. Here she likes to spend the long hours of the day reading of saintly experience and knightly adventure. I can see her now, with the blossoms all about her, as she looks out over the level valley to the distant crags of Monte Rosa, showing pale and soft against the blue sky. She believes there will some time come to her Arbor of Dreams a knight without reproach. Is it not strange that such fancies should fill the mind of a child?"

"It seems not strange to me," replied Raimbaut, "for ever since I was a little lad of ten I have been

blessed with dreams like hers. Bernart has told you already of my vow. I pray God both night and morning that my heart may be kept pure, and that there may come to me some day the Perfect Love."

"I never cease to wonder," said Bonifaz, "how such conceits can take possession of one. There come no dreams to me and no imaginings. I plan to fight like my ancestors for the glory of the Cross, and am often impatient against the decree which keeps me here at Toulouse, learning pretty manners for which I have neither respect nor liking. Until to-day, my only consolation has been good Bernart, and the singing of songs I love. At last I have found in you the friend for whom I have been hungering. Shall we pledge ourselves to be comrades and brothers at the fireside, with drawn swords for each enemy, and an open hand to every friend?"

"I am ready," replied Raimbaut; "friend and brother will I be until death parts us."

With a feeling of deep solemnity the boys clasped hands, and they were very serious as they walked back to the palace. During dinner Raimbaut spoke little, and was too preoccupied to notice the smiles with which the Countess Bellisenda favored him from the high table. It did not take her long, however, to dispel the boy's reveries when she met him in the courtyard with the falcon on her wrist.

It was mid-afternoon. As they rode slowly over the long bridge which led across the Garonne, a cool breeze rippled the water and tempered the heat

of the descending sun. There was scarce a cloud in the blue sky, and the air was so clear that a lark could be followed to its highest flight. It was a day to give rapture to a falconer, and yet, to Raimbaut's surprise, he found the Countess disinclined to talk concerning the science of which he was so fond. She was bravely apparelled in a robe of dark green, and her tunic of a lighter shade was ornamented with twisted threads of gold and cut so as to reveal her white neck and the dimples in her throat.

They were the last of the falconing party, an arrangement quite to the liking of the Countess, who leisurely mounted her horse when the others were riding through the gate. Miraval had not failed to notice the manœuvres of the Countess and whispered to Folquet, —

" Bellisenda has donned her green robe. Alas for Messire Raimbaut and his vow! Unless Saint Martin help him, he will be forsworn this day."

" Ah! " replied Folquet, " I remember well when I went falconing with the beautiful Countess of Polignac. She found a woodland path, and we rested on a green bank by a little stream until the shadows fell."

" Yes," continued Miraval, " and she doffed her shoes and stockings, kirtled her robe to her knee, and waded in the cool water. Saint Anthony himself would have fallen, had he seen her white limbs! Faith, I do not think Raimbaut is quite a saint, in spite of his earnestness."

Indeed, there was many a knowing smile and merry word as the party rode out of the courtyard, leaving the Countess to follow with the young sire of Vacqueiras. Last of all to disappear through the gateway was Alazais, and on the face of the little demoiselle was an expression of mingled admiration and disapproval as she looked back at the laggards.

Raimbaut felt a thrill of pleasure when he held the slender foot in his hand and lifted the lovely Bellisenda to her saddle. He was very proud to ride by her side, the sole escort of a chatelaine so beautiful, and as he gazed into her smiling face, the boy's cheeks flushed.

They rode over the rattling planks, speaking seldom, so deafening was the noise; but when the hoofbeats were muffled by the soft turf, they talked of many things: the weather, the latest song, the palace gossip, it mattered not what, so long as they could hear each other's voice.

Bellisenda had taken quite a different course from that chosen by the falconing party, following the river for a little, and then turning toward the forest that fringed the meadows with a darker green. A flock of partridges drummed in the heather, but Raimbaut was deaf to the sound. A heron oared his swift course across the sky, but the Countess did not see him or loosen the falcon from her wrist. They wandered oblivious to all the world, until they reached the forest and came to a woodland path into which Bellisenda turned, with Raimbaut at her elbow.

The shadows were like a cool lake into which they plunged. Over their heads the branches spread a thick arbor, through which the sun sent splashes of golden light. The air was fragrant with the odor of leaf and twig and forest flower.

For a long time neither spoke. Raimbaut was under the magic spell of the woodland; the Countess was content to let her eyes wander from the boy's handsome face to his well-knit figure and back again, in time to give an answering smile. So narrow was the way that they were barely able to ride together, their horses walking flank to flank. Again and again the Countess leaned toward Raimbaut to avoid an intruding branch, until at last with a long sigh of content she rested her head upon his shoulder. At this the boy's blood kindled, and the fragrance of her golden hair made him blind with rapture.

So they rode side by side, into the depths of the forest, and with every step Raimbaut seemed to enter a new world whose secret he longed to solve. At last they came to a parting of the ways. The Countess drew rein and lifted her head.

"Which road shall we take?" she asked in tones vibrant with passion.

"Truly, I know not," answered Raimbaut, his voice sounding faint and distant to him as if in a dream.

"Yet you must choose," declared Bellisenda. "The left path leads back to the palace; this other to a green bank by the side of a woodland stream. It is

starred with violets which fill the air with perfume. There we can rest and bathe our feet in the cool waters. You shall sing to me your song of the brook, and I will grant any favor you may ask for your reward. Choose between these paths. Whither shall we go?"

She touched her horse's flank, went a few steps down the right pathway, then turned and faced him like a woodland nymph in her green robe, as prodigal, as generous, as unrestrained. Her face was flushed, her bosom rose and fell, her eyes were bright, her lips parted. She was so beautiful that as Raimbaut looked upon her the fire in his breast burst into flame.

Must he choose between the vacant path and this other where Bellisenda waited, the very priestess of pleasure?

His choice was already made: every drop of blood in his veins cried out for her. He was about to follow, realizing fully to what the road must lead, careless of aught else, forgetful of his vow. Then suddenly he remembered the pure face of the child Biatritz. In the dark eyes there was a look of appeal. The glamour of the forest weakened. His memory returned to him. His conscience whispered, and then cried out insistent. So great was the revulsion of feeling that he reeled in his saddle. Then he sat upright, clear-eyed and resolute.

Bellisenda waited, the smile of confidence fading. Raimbaut lifted the frayed corner of his mantle to his lips, crossed himself, and cried,—

"I choose the left path! So help me God, I will keep my vow!"

Quick as a swooping falcon, the Countess struck him on the cheek with her loose glove once, twice, and thrice. Then she put spurs to her horse and galloped swiftly toward the palace, Raimbaut following after, his face pale as Death, save where the glove had left its mark upon his cheek.

CHAPTER XII

THE TOWER OF NIGHTINGALES

THE Count and Countess of Polignac took their departure the day following Bellisenda's ride with Raimbaut. She bade him a formal good-bye, but there was a flash in the lady's eye which showed that she had not forgotten.

A single week found Raimbaut comfortably settled in the household of Count Raimon. He learned that Toulouse was the Rosy City, not because its bricks were red, but because its very life was the color of the rose. Here knights laid aside their armor, and men-at-arms walked the streets without their swords. From the open windows came the tinkle of the lute, and even ragged urchins were singing the songs of Bernart, or Borneil, or Daniel. The merchants discussed poetry as they bought and sold their goods, and the Bishop of Saint Sernin paid more attention to the perfection of his choir than to his doctrine. The great city was ingenuous as any tiny village nestling among the vineyards. From morn to eve the air was full of music and song and laughter. Young-heartedness, the joy of life, was over all. If Toulouse was the city of song, the palace was his centre. Its council-chamber was deserted, and grass grew high in the tilt-yard.

The day began with Mass in the chapel at Saint

Sernin, for those who loved a pilgrimage at early dawn. After breakfast the broad fields invited the lover of hawk or dog. Those who cared for neither could ride with falcon ostentatiously on wrist, and spend the hours of the morning in the thrust and parry of gay words and soft glances. There were few laggards at dinner, for the long morning in the open air gave appetites not easily satisfied. In the afternoon, one might visit the city with its shops, or while away the time in the cool shade of the garden. Should the day prove stormy, there were dice, chess, or tennis, as one might choose. Affairs of love and gallantry were never lacking to flavor every occupation and amusement. With nightfall came the supper, which Count Raimon chose to make his most important meal, and then followed songs and stories until the torches flared along the corridors, showing the way to soft couches.

Raimbaut found his life an easy one, for the Count asked little personal service of his squires. He had servants who could better attend to his wardrobe, his armor, and his horses. This left the squires free to sing and to serve as cavaliers about the palace. They spent many hours in the Tower of Nightingales, where, under the mild sceptre of good Bernart, time flowed on with scarce a ripple. Miraval's too trenchant wit caused an occasional storm, but it soon blew over and was succeeded by the habitual calm.

Day after day old songs were sung, new ones tried,

and fresh ones written. Some hours were given to study, but more to the art to which the young squires had devoted themselves. They discussed each other's work freely, and compared their own lines with the classics of the old masters. Bonifaz, Guilhem, and Raimbaut were unquestioning disciples of Bernart, but Folquet was becoming more and more a follower of the scholarly Borneil. Miraval was an open admirer of Daniel, but so loyal was Bonifaz to his master that he saw little merit in any other work, and he closed every discussion with the declaration,— "There has been but one troubadour born into the world. His name is Bernart of Ventadorn."

On a rainy afternoon in the late autumn, the squires were gathered in the tower. It was cold and raw, with a bitter wind blowing from the bare meadows. Raimbaut and Bonifaz stood together by the window, and Miraval leaned against the chimney-corner. Folquet sat with his finger in a book, and Guilhem had curled himself up on the hearth where a sparkling fire was burning. Bernart was sitting in a wide chair as close as possible to the flames. The heat and the cheeriness of the room made the old troubadour talkative.

"Tell me, my children," said he, with a twinkle in his blue eye, "which is better — to love perfectly, or to woo successfully?"

"A tenso! A tenso!" cried Miraval eagerly, "I choose success, and challenge Raimbaut to answer me."

"I will do my best," replied Raimbaut, "though I know right well that the tenso is not my forte. I hope the strength of my cause will offset its defender's weakness."

Miraval took his place in the middle of the room, lute in hand, and began without the least hesitation. No one of his companions was so ready, or sang as easily. He claimed that love was like war: the object, to win the stronghold of a lady's heart. The prizes were bright smiles, sweet kisses, soft caresses. Gold, jewels, and rich gifts also belonged to the victor, should he be a poor troubadour. To seek Perfect Love was like the quest of the green rose, or the black pearl.

When he ended, the applause was long and enthusiastic.

"Well done, Sire of Miraval!" cried Bernart. "I' faith, I wonder how Raimbaut can answer you. I warn him, he will find it a hard task to convince me that a troubadour should not expect his reward."

Raimbaut rose with his lute under his arm, evidently too much in earnest. Not so glib as Miraval, to him the words did not come fluently, but they were stronger and more expressive. He replied that he who looked for the rewards of love was a wanton, and should wear shoulder-knots like his frail sister. He was a hired soldier who fought for plunder. Even in war, a true knight supported the right, and thought not of victory. He claimed it was better to fail seeking a high ideal, than to succeed in a common quest.

Perfect Love was the rose of Paradise, the jewel of life.

When Raimbaut finished, Bernart shook his head saying, —

" My dear Raimbaut, there has been one Jaufre Rudel to die for love of his Princess Far-Away. You are too poor to think always of the ideal. I must remind you of the old Provençal adage, — ' Praise the sea, but stay on dry land.' I warn you because I love you, and because I have such high hopes of your future. Above all things, do not sing over the head of your audience."

Raimbaut had been so often praised that the rebuff seemed doubly severe, but he received it without protest, although he still believed himself to be right. The old troubadour, satisfied that he had taught Raimbaut a useful lesson, became reminiscent, and looking at the young men around him, said, —

" In a few years the world must look to you for its great songs. Raimbaut of Courthézon has laid aside his lute; its strings are broken by the black hand of Death. With me, only Peire d'Alvernhe is left of those who groped the way, that others who followed might find an easier path. Next to us comes Rogier, whose feet are on the descending slope and whose eyes are towards the west. I fear I cannot judge him fairly. He seems never to have quite discarded the monastic habit. He always wears the cloak of the troubadour lightly on the shoulder. He has written some good songs of his Ermengarda, whose beauty

needs strong praise to make it pass. I never listen to him but I hear the drone of the choir and smell the odor of smoking candles! He will go back to them before he dies."

As Bernart was speaking thus about Rogier, Folquet moved uneasily on his seat in the corner and interrupted with, —

"Do you not believe that a man may serve the Church well and faithfully, and yet find good songs to the praise of his love?"

"No, I do not," replied Bernart. "There are three great vocations from which a youth of intelligence, courage and ambition may choose. He may be a churchman, a knight, or a troubadour. But more than one, he cannot be. The Gospel says, — 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' Just as true is it that a man's service cannot be divided in this world. Let him choose between the Church, the pursuit of arms, or a life of song; but let him not hope to juggle with the Cross in one hand and a lute in the other. He is sure to drop one of them and perhaps both, before he is done with the game. Notice Bertran de Born, who comes next. He is really a knight. He thinks the clash of arms is sweeter than the sound of the viol. His songs are as cutting as his sword, and he makes strife wherever he goes."

"Cannot a Crusader act as servant both of knighthood and Holy Church, being a disciple of the Gay Science as well?"

This question Bonifaz asked most respectfully, and

Bernart answered with a kindly glance of his blue eyes, —

" In truth, Messire Bonifaz, I doubt that any one can do all these things; but if it were possible, there is none could do it better than yourself. You have the strength and courage of the knight, the pure soul of the churchman, and the joy of the troubadour."

Bernart continued, —

" Glad am I to come to the best singer of us all. Guiraut de Borneil shifts not to cassock nor to shirt of mail. Of lowly birth, he has not been led astray by the distractions of high position. His one ambition is to sing his best, and with a single heart he follows his ideal. He makes our best melodies and smoothest metre. He is a thinker who has seen visions. Were he less the student and more the man with red blood in his veins, he would be a perfect exponent of our science of song. Give me your lute, Raimbaut, and I will show you a gem of Provençal poetry."

Bernart interpreted his rival's " And soon will come the morning," with so much sympathy that the squires listened breathless until he laid the lute aside and resumed his discourse.

" Borneil, like Bertran, is approaching the end of his two-score years, and will outlive the latter, who is destined to feed the crows hovering over the battle-field. There remain but four who have won their way to a high level of fame. There are many others who haunt the little castles on the distant

hills, but no troubadours who are worth a day's journey to hear. These four have not yet reached their thirtieth year, yet are they known through all Provence and Languedoc. They have but to decide what castle or court they shall choose, and which lady they shall honor with their songs. Rich are the gifts and many are the smiles bestowed upon them. Berguedan the Spaniard is the eldest. He has too much of the red blood that Borneil lacks. He has the voice of an angel and the soul of a devil. A beast is he who honors not woman, and some day his handsome carcass will be found in the gutter, carved fantastically by a wronged husband's dagger, 'T is 'fair water following a foul taste,' to speak of Arnaut de Maruelh after the wicked Catalonian. Arnaut has a soul as pure as that of Jaufre Rudel, and will love as nobly. He has not yet chosen his lady, but when he does he will never change, but sing to her alone. There are a hundred fair hands stretched out to him, yet he is not spoiled. Peire Raimon hath a fault most rare in singers: to wit, excessive modesty. So retiring is he that he blushes when a lady looks at him, and runs away when she offers him a favor. Even the cold and modest like not a man like this, and however well he may sing, he cannot succeed unless with years there come to him a spark of courage. Last of all, though not least, I grant you, comes Arnaut Daniel. They call him the 'word-smith,' and rightly. To many this seems a term of praise; to me a criticism most severe.

Compare his verse with that of Borneil, and notice how stiff, how labored, and how artificial! He may claim that easy rhymes belong to the fortunate lover, but one as unsuccessful as himself must choose difficult metre, involved metaphors, curious rhymes. He is proud to say, 'I am Arnaut, who chase the wind, hunt the hare on an ox, and swim against the stream.'"

"Yes," said Folquet, "and the silly man got a sharp answer from the Monk of Montaudon. 'Since you started to hunt rabbits with an ox and to swim upstream, you have forgotten how to sing; your back is stiff from your ride, and you have a cold in the head which leaves you but a snuffle. Clearly the water is bad for you.'"

At the monk's criticism of Daniel, Miraval's brows grew dark, and he said, —

"It is easy for those who can make only songs with rhymes like 'love' and 'dove,' and 'spring' and 'ring,' to criticise the works of Daniel; but there are many who think that a troubadour should not sing like a vine-dresser. A jewel cannot be too highly polished, neither can a poem be too carefully finished."

"I am the last to pose as an oracle," said Bernart. "I but expressed my poor opinion, to which I might bring many supporters, — among them our good master and Amfos of Barcelona, the two greatest patrons of the Gay Science."

"But," insisted Miraval, "is it not possible that

both you and they are prejudiced against the better school, which is bound to supersede the simpler method to which you have been accustomed?"

Bonifaz was about to enter the lists, and had gone as far as, "A good blacksmith was spoiled when Daniel took to writing verses," when Bernart stopped him with uplifted hand.

"Indeed, the Sire of Miraval may be right. It is easy for one to become prejudiced through birth, training and surroundings. Shall I tell you something of myself? My father was a simple bowman, and my mother served in the kitchen of my Lord of Ventadorn. As a boy I showed some promise and was educated by the priests, but proved unfitted for the service of the Church. I have found many songs, some of which may be unforgotten when I am no longer even a memory. I have had my little loves, and one great passion. How many years are before me, only the good saints know. When my voice fails me, I shall not struggle vainly against old age, nor be laughed at for my quavers. There is a quiet cell awaiting me at Dalon, where I can watch the sun sink in the west, and wait for the shadows of death to gather."

For a moment Bernart's face was sad and his voice subdued, but in another instant he threw off his melancholy with a cheery laugh.

"I' faith!" cried he, "I had all but buried myself, had I not? Yet it is useless to conceal from you that the noon of the troubadour is a short one. With

gray hairs the plaudits disappear. Here is Raimbaut, with the poor fief of Vacqueiras perhaps already lost. Tell me, Miraval, had he not better enter the Church?"

Thus challenged, Miraval replied, —

"I doubt if he would find a hair-shirt comfortable, or black bread and water satisfying. He has been spoiled for all this by his soft life here at Toulouse."

"Well, Folquet," said Bernart, "what think you of the soldier's life for him? A single act of daring might make his fortune, if it caught the eye of his leader."

"Raimbaut would find a suit of mail more agreeable than a hair-shirt," answered Folquet. "He might be content enough to spend his days trotting around on the back of a rough-gaited charger, with a steel pot on his head."

"Perhaps," agreed Bernart; "but he must take his chances of getting a wound in his first encounter, which will make him a helpless cripple, or of having his life taken by some sturdy villain with half his brains and no gift of song. What say you, Bonifaz? Shall we make a knight of Raimbaut?"

"We will make nothing of Raimbaut," answered Bonifaz, putting his large brown hand on his friend's shoulder. "He shall choose when, and what, he will. I am sure that in the Church he will be no less than a cardinal; in armor, no worse than a knight-banneret; and as a troubadour, the best singer of us all."

CHAPTER XIII

THE MONK OF MONTAUDON

As the months went by, Raimbaut became more and more a favorite at the court of good Count Raimon The men-at-arms admired him for his prowess with the sword, and a bout with the young sire of Vacqueiras was a matter of congratulation, although none could boast of anything but an honorable defeat. The varlets loved him because he troubled them not, and had always a smile for the humblest. Even the merchants in the city were proud of him, and spoke respectfully, although he was too poor to fill their coffers.

He wrote long letters to Anselme, but whenever he declared his intention to visit Vacqueiras he was informed that it would not be safe either for himself or Peirol. Anselme's replies gave the homely news of the villagers, the births, the marriages and the deaths. Guilhem had succeeded his uncle in the rights, titles and seignories of the Count of Courthézon. Peirol's condition was unchanged, and of his cure there was slight hope. Twice the good priest warned Raimbaut against Berguedan, but no reason was given why the Spaniard should wish to injure him, and there was no hint as to how he was likely to be assailed. Anselme's letters always ended with an appeal for fidelity to God's grace and for a life of self-

sacrifice and devotion. This was not lost upon Raimbaut. The brown village among the hills seemed very far from Toulouse. Here the great object of life was the pursuit of pleasure, the beautiful sight, the delicious taste, the fragrant odor, and the sweet song. Raimbaut's vow seemed half a challenge to the fair demoiselles and lovely chatelaines who came to the palace, and often was his strength tested as by the fascinating Bellisenda.

Of the other squires, Guilhem was only a boy, not to be taken seriously, and the ladies petted him until he fled from them. Folquet was too much the student, but made an interesting lover. Bonifaz was most disappointing. Although he loved a life of song, his heart was firmly fixed on the glories of knighthood; and for the ladies he cared not at all.

Miraval was the prince of gallants: he had the manner of a man of the world, a rather languid air of " I-wonder-if-it-be-really-worth-while," which was irresistible. He played one pretty chatelaine against another with the skill of an experienced carpet-knight. He loved the game for its own sake, and was proud of his conquests. Alazais did not care for him, but she hated to have him drawn away from his allegiance to her by this or that complacent lady who happened to be spending a few days at the palace. Now she did not hesitate to show her preference for the young sire of Vacqueiras, nor did she sympathize with the pangs of jealousy which Miraval suffered. She liked Raimbaut because she had been able to

help him: it gave her a feeling of possession. His father's misfortune evoked her pity. Accustomed to admiration, she found the ordinary compliments of the courtier commonplace, but Raimbaut, fresh from a simple village life, was like a breeze of the morning. His vivid fancy constantly opened new vistas to her slower imagination. The pretty demoiselle had ideas of her own about which she liked to speak, and the respect with which Raimbaut listened to her lectures on manners and morals was very flattering. It was easy for him to do this, as he found her theories like his own.

Alazais taught that the most desirable of all things was love that should come to youth as the almond blossom to early April. Not the love of the peasant with its passion and its desire, but a devotion which asked for little and found complete satisfaction in itself. The sincerity of such a love must bring *joi* — a young-heartedness which made meanness impossible, and life a continuous springtime. Yet no matter how great the gladness, *mesura* — the moderation of perfect poise — must control every act. If in these things a man were true to himself, he might hope to attain to the ideal of his life, — *cortesia*, — the courtliness of the faultless gentleman: purity of soul manifest in polished manner and excellence of conduct. This was the code which Alazais taught, which Raimbaut accepted, and to which he gave his unqualified allegiance.

The first step, that of love, he had already taken.

What was more natural, after his experience at Beaucaire, than to love Alazais? He knew he could expect nothing more in return than a smile, a word of praise, or the right to wear her glove in his helmet. Each day found them more in sympathy, until Raimbaut was recognized as her chosen cavalier. This was wormwood and ashes to Miraval, who was furious at the rival who had supplanted him. Although he had been held by a light leash, often broken, he was very fond of the fair demoiselle, and, above all, his pride was injured by his deposition.

It did not take long for the other squires to discover the condition of affairs, and their jokes rankled in Miraval's heart. He had the mortification of seeing Raimbaut riding by Alazais' side for a morning with the falcons: Alazais had discovered that Raimbaut was best able to handle her hawk. He saw Raimbaut walking with her to the shops: Alazais had learned that Raimbaut had a nice taste in color. It was Raimbaut who carried her book, who copied her songs, and bore her messages. He lived in a new world, fragrant, rose-colored, luxurious; and he worshipped with whole-hearted devotion the princess who ruled it.

It was late afternoon of a January day. Snowflakes had been falling since morning, disappearing in the hungry waters of the Garonne, spreading a mantle over the broad plains across the river.

In the hall of the palace a huge fire was burning,

and around it the household had gathered. At the left of the hearth, in the seat of honor, sat Count Raimon with Bernart, bending over a chess-table. The Count, evidently in difficulties, was studying each move, while Bernart, playing with apparent carelessness, kept a bright eye on all that went on around him.

On the other side sat Folquet, dicing with a young baron who was spending a few days at the palace. Their faces were flushed, for the stakes were high, and they kept up a continuous clatter with the tumbling cubes.

Guilhem was telling what he declared to be a "true story," and Miraval was making his task difficult by a volley of skeptical questions.

In an alcove, a little distance from the fire, were Alazais and Raimbaut. This, the place where he had written his first poem, was Raimbaut's favorite retreat. Alazais had chosen it to-day because she was engaged in illuminating a missal, and here she found a good light and the quiet that she loved. At her elbow were pots of paints and strips of gold, and before her lay the precious leaf of parchment over which she had already spent many hours. She had chosen an initial letter from Raimbaut's Book of Hours, and was trying with infinite patience to copy the dark blue scroll which surrounded it, and the rich red blossoms which flourished on the slender tendrils. Raimbaut, bending over her shoulder, watched the work intently, seldom speaking for

fear of distracting her attention. The Book of Hours was propped up by a piece of manuscript which had already shown a tendency to prove unstable, and now suddenly rolled away, letting the Book fall to the floor.

As Raimbaut sprang to pick it up, Alazais noticed that from the loosened cover there protruded a lock of hair, which he carefully tucked inside the fold before he placed the volume on the table again. She said not a word, however, for several minutes continuing her work as if nothing had happened. It was only when she finished the letter that she looked up and said, —

"Well, Messire Raimbaut, that is enough for this day's task. Now I wish to be amused. Tell me a story."

"Gladly will I," replied Raimbaut, "if you will make a choice. Which shall it be? Do you prefer comedy or tragedy? Would you laugh or cry? I have a story of Helen of Troy which perhaps may please you."

"I know not whether I shall laugh or cry," answered Alazais, "but I choose a romance. Make the time within a year or two, the lover like yourself, and the lady anything you please, if you but give her auburn tresses. She shall have auburn tresses, a lock of which she grants her lover, who hides it inside the cover of his book."

At this thrust Raimbaut could scarce forbear a smile, in spite of the respect he bore his mistress.

She faced him, keen-eyed and insistent, a touch of color in her cheeks.

"Truly," he declared, "it was no lock of fair lady's hair that fell from my book, and with it is no tale of love."

"Well, tell the story, whatever it may be," commanded Alazais, "and remember, to-day it is my fancy to have the tale ungarnished. You must forgive me if I prove a whit exacting; but when at the beginning I am asked to disbelieve my eyes, you must not expect to find me very credulous at the end."

For a moment Raimbaut hesitated; then he opened the Book, turned back the cover, and showed Alazais the tuft of hair from the mane of the red roan.

"I' faith," said he, "should I choose a mistress with auburn tresses, I hope they may not grow so coarse as this! Bonifaz tells the story of a knight who fell in love with his horse. I was once wondrous fond of a colt at Vacqueiras, but her mane was gray. I cannot tell you the story of this lock of hair, except to say that I keep it in memory of a crime."

As Raimbaut spoke, his face grew dark, and he sat for several minutes in silence looking out over the river to the white fields beyond. Alazais, watching him meanwhile, was about to speak, when there came a gust of wind from the outer door, followed by the crash as it swung back again on its hinges, and then by

a babel of voices which brought them both to their feet.

As they stood in the archway, they could look down the hall and see the huge figure of a monk, so plastered by the storm that he seemed a snow-image. Around him surged a crowd of young people who, seizing him on all sides, dragged him, not unwilling, to the fireside. Here they fell away as he bowed to the Count, with the assurance which only could come to a tried favorite, certain of a welcome. His habit was gathered into his girdle, revealing drenched sandals, thick ankles, and legs like those of Goliath of Gath. His girth was prodigious, his face the picture of good humor; his black eyes were dancing with merriment, and the corners of his mouth the very haunts of roguery. In spite of the confusion, he had a ready answer to the shafts of wit that were shot at him.

To Raimbaut's look of inquiry Alazais replied, —

" Do you not know him? It is the merry Monk of Montaudon. I approve of him no more than my father; but we smile when we should frown, and like him in spite of ourselves."

At the first interval of silence, the Count spoke, —

" Good Martin, we are pleased to see you again. It is never a dull afternoon with you by the fireside. I know you did not fall with the snow-flakes, for we should have heard a noise in the courtyard. You always appear like this, suddenly and without warning! Either you are carried by the angels from place

to place, or you are in league with the Evil One, who bears you where he will."

At this there was a shout of laughter, which broke into a roar when the monk replied, —

"I' faith, you have discovered me. A good churchman makes friends both of the Powers of light and darkness, and uses both. It was an angel carried me to Avignon; but when I told him my destination was Toulouse, he said he never came this way. A pair of very lusty fiends from the nether world brought me hither. One tried it alone, but finding me too heavy, he called for help, and there came his fellow also."

Even the Count laughed until the tears stood in his eyes.

"Brother Martin, you are too much for me! Not a word will we speak if you tell us the news you have gathered in your wanderings. No one comes to Toulouse so richly laden, and none can tell his tale so well."

Already a huge fauteuil had been dragged to the hearth, and giving himself a shake which sent the drops of water spinning all about him, Brother Martin sank into the capacious seat with a sigh of content. He gave another sigh as he accepted a tall flagon of red wine, of which he first tasted delicately, rolling the liquor about his mouth; and then, throwing back his head, he drank slowly, without taking breath, until the last drop had disappeared.

For a long moment after there was silence, as he

beamed upon his audience, the smile lurking in the corner of his thick lips becoming more and more effulgent as he saw the expectation and welcome on every face. At last he spoke, with a voice rich and ponderous: —

" Believe me, friends, if the chariot of Saint Elias should roll to the door at this minute and an angel should say to me, ' Come, Martin, you are too good for this sinful world. Get in here beside me and I will drive you straight to paradise,' I should answer, ' Pardon me, my friend: better a heaven you know, than a heaven you do not know. I go not with you, but stay right here in the palace of Toulouse.' "

There was a flutter of applause, but no one spoke for fear of interrupting, and the monk continued, —

" I have a thousand things to tell, but one big bit of news from Avignon which makes everything else seem small. Tell me, good friends, have any of you ever heard the name of Benizet? I have a denier in my purse which I will give to any one who will tell me where Benizet was born, where he has lived, and what has been his occupation."

He drew a denier from the fat pouch which hung at his girdle, —

" I am a poor man, as all of you know. This is my last piece of money, yet will I give it to any one who knows aught of Benizet, the most famous man in all Provence."

Again he waited for dramatic effect, and in spite

of his assertion was a little disconcerted when Jacques said deprecatingly, —

" If the honest monk really wishes to know, and the denier is a good one, I will tell him that Benizet is a goatherd, born in Vacqueiras, who has kept his flock upon the hills above the village."

At this announcement the monk shrugged his shoulders, joined in the chorus of laughter, and tossed the coin over the heads of the crowd to Jacques, who caught it deftly in his mouth.

" Alas! " said Martin, " that was a fit punishment for a rash promise. I now have another question to ask, and for an answer to this I can hold out no promise of reward. Tell me, do all of you believe in miracles? You do! Well, that did not I till yesterweek. Of course, I did not doubt that miracles had been performed; but I thought the saints had become weary, or had lost their knack, as happens sometimes to a good cook with pasties. Well, listen to me, while I tell the story of my conversion.

" You must know that from Valence to Avignon neither angel nor imp could I get to carry me, so I walked on my two poor feet; and when I arrived at the palace the Bishop, noticing how foot-sore and weary I was, invited me to stay a few days with him, for my physical recuperation, and for his own soul's strengthening.

" We were sitting in the refectory one evening, lingering over an eel-pie, for which I confess a carnal liking, when a friar brought news to us that a rough

peasant was declaring about the city that he had been commanded by God to build a bridge over the Rhone. He was calling every one to help him: those who were rich, with gold; and those who were poor, by the labor of their hands. The friar reported that most of the people mocked the man as a crazy enthusiast, but that he was gathering about him a little band who believed that he really had a mission.

"To this report the Bishop gave but slight notice, warning the friar not to intrude again while he was engaged at table with news so uninteresting. We heard nothing more at the palace, and I had quite forgotten about the matter, when the city was suddenly put in an uproar. As the Bishop was preaching to his people, a ragged peasant came striding down the aisle and, halting before the pulpit, cried out with a loud voice, — 'Hear me, and know that Jesus Christ has sent me to you that I may build a bridge over the Rhone!' You can easily believe that this was most disconcerting to the good Bishop, thus interrupted in a learned discourse on the miraculous draught of fishes. He did not lose his presence of mind, however, but turned the man over to the chief constable of the town, with instructions to confine him if he were crazy, but if a wilful impostor, to make an example of him to all those who would disturb the peace of Toulouse.

"The next morning we were breakfasting on the famous fish of the Sorgues, cooked with chestnuts and olives. They are very tempting to the palate,

especially when washed down with a few bottles of the red wine of Roussillon. We were at breakfast, I say, when the chief constable broke in upon us. He was a simple creature, and seemed in sore straits to discover his duty. He said that the man had answered all questions clearly. He gave his name as Benizet, goatherd from Vacqueiras, and to their threatenings he fearlessly replied, 'My Lord Jesus Christ has sent me to this city to make a bridge over the river.' The constable reported that he was at a loss to know what to do, and asked that he might bring the man to the palace for the Bishop's own judgment.

"To this his Lordship agreed, only stipulating, very reasonably, that an hour be left for the eating of the fish and another hour for its proper digestion. Furthermore, the good man protested strongly against the frequent interruptions which had come to him at table, and insisted that thereafter all doors should be closed until his meals were over.

"It so happened that it was nearly noon, and we were sitting in the hall, the Bishop on his high seat, I near at hand, and the canons on their benches, when the door was opened and the constable entered, followed by a rabble, and holding the disturber by the shoulder. This last was a tall fellow with red hair bleached by the sun, who wore a rough coat and looked as if he had slept all his life under the stars and rain. He was pale and gaunt, and on his face was a light such as I have never seen before.

"To the Bishop's questions he answered clearly that his name was Benizet, and that he came from Vacqueiras, where he kept his uncle's goats. When asked why he had left his herd, he replied that it was at the call of God, who commanded him to build a bridge across the Rhone; which task he was certain to complete with the help of Our Lady.

"'What then!' exclaimed the Bishop, looking down scornfully from his high seat, 'do you, who are the least of men, and who possess nothing but your two hands, boast that you are about to make a bridge where neither God, nor Saint Peter, nor Saint Paul, nor Charlemagne himself, has been able to do it?'

"To this the goatherd replied as simply as if he were a little child repeating his creed: 'Through the power of Christ who has commanded me, I will build this bridge.'

"'But how will you build it?' inquired the Bishop. 'Will you make it span the waters in a night, in answer to your prayers?'

"'I have no doubt of Christ's power to build it in a single night; but it is my duty to erect the bridge with the gold of the rich and the labor of the poor, who have nought else to give. It is to be built of stones and lime, which I shall beg from those who possess them.'

"'Very well,' said the Bishop, 'if this is your plan, I will make you a gift of the first stone for your bridge from this palace. It is a mighty stone, worthy of so

great a structure. If you are able to carry it to the river's edge, I shall believe that you are able to build the bridge, and will help you further.'

" To this Benizet replied, —

" ' Show me the stone. I put my trust in God, who will give me strength to carry it.'

" ' Follow me, then,' answered the Bishop, ' and let me see the wonders which you can do.'

" Thereupon he stepped down from his high seat and we all followed to the outer court, I close to his elbow, and so near Benizet that I could study him carefully. His face was as calm as if he slept, his hand did not tremble, neither did he breathe quickly. We crossed the court and came to a low gateway, before which the Bishop paused, and looked at the huge stone over it. It was as large as an altar; and truly when I eyed it, I did not believe it could be lifted by a score of men. The Bishop pointed to it and turned to Benizet, saying, —

" ' There is the first stone for your bridge.'

" Benizet knelt a moment in prayer, and rose in a dead silence. He then walked slowly to the gateway, bent his knees, and placed his shoulder under the stone. When first he straightened his legs, I noticed the mortar cracked on one side. At his second effort he broke the stone loose; the third time he lifted it clear, and started for the river.

" For a moment we were so amazed that we did not follow, but when we could gather our wits together, we hurried after. He walked straight to the river-

brink, and I was by his side when he threw his mighty burden into the swift water. He then turned to the multitude with his hands extended in an attitude of appeal, but not a single word did he speak.

" At this the people gave a great shout, weeping and embracing one another, so overcome were they with their emotions. For an instant the Bishop looked amazed, then he cried in a loud voice, — ' It is a miracle! It is the hand of God!' And we all fell on our knees by the river-bank.

" Soon there gathered a great crowd, who followed Benizet and the Bishop in procession to the church, chanting as they walked. Thither, the news having been bruited about, came the whole city. The constable himself, who had been first to kiss the hand of Benizet, pledged three hundred sous; the Bishop promised as many more; and in that same place within an hour ten thousand sous were given. Indeed, there is now a lack neither of men nor money, and a bridge will surely span the Rhone through the efforts of this same simple goatherd, Benizet of Vacqueiras."

Every one listened intently. When he finished, there were exclamations of wonder on every side. The household of Toulouse was not overburdened with religion, but the most skeptical were impressed by the earnestness with which the Monk of Montaudon told the story of Benizet.

Raimbaut became so interested as the tale progressed, that he left Alazais and took his place by

Jacques. The latter, who had always belittled Benizet and his mission, was quite overcome, and could scarce gather together confidence enough to sniff incredulously from time to time.

The monk, after wetting his dry throat with another flagon of wine, started on a spicy tale in which the reputation of the chatelaine of Bagnols was more than breathed upon, and Raimbaut and Jacques slipped away to the quiet of the tower to talk over the surprising revelation. Even thus far, however, the voice of Martin penetrated when he sang, as did the shouts and laughter which followed. Jacques was still incredulous and declared, —

"It is nothing more than a trick to gain money from the pious."

"But," Raimbaut replied, "you forget that the Bishop mocked at Benizet, and that instead of obtaining money, he paid out of the diocesan coffers! What had the clerics to gain from a bridge over the Rhone?"

This Jacques could not answer, and he fell back on the great physical strength of the goatherd for his argument against the miracle.

"This Benizet is as strong as Saint Samson, who pulled down a palace with his two hands. I have never seen the goatherd's power fully tried; but a dozen men, who had struggled in vain to lift the load of charcoal which pinned Etienne to the ground, saw Benizet raise it as if it were a basket of grapes."

"I know not what to think," declared Raimbaut. "Even when my father came to his grievous hurt and

my prayers were not answered, I never doubted the power or goodness of God. I will have faith that the saints love and help us."

"Saints," replied Jacques, "are always asking credit for good done, but take no blame for the ills that come to us. Bah! They are like my little dog at Vacqueiras, who comes up proudly wagging his tail whenever I have snared a rabbit. That Etienne, the charcoal-burner, has a saying that 'A man's best patron saint is his own right hand.'"

Jacques' practical views of life not infrequently served to bring his master's head out of the clouds. But at these too cynical observations Raimbaut shook his head and dismissed him. He wished to be alone. For a long time he looked out over the black waters. Did not Our Lady hear his prayers and intercede with her Blessed Son? Did not Saint Martin know of his vow, and help him to keep it? Should he not some day find the Perfect Love for which he yearned? He stood at the window until he could no longer see the pallid fields; in his mind the unanswered questions, in his heart the unfinished struggle.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RED ROAN

THE tide of spring was at its flood. The palace was deserted, and the Tower of Nightingales was empty. The ripple of the water against the wall, the sight of the green meadows across the river, the fragrance of flowers drifting through the windows, and the songs of birds mating in the garden, were calls too insistent for the young squires to refuse. From early dawn to late dusk they were abroad, Folquet alone proving faithful, and even he devoting only the afternoon to his books.

To Raimbaut it seemed the very April of life. He had developed fast during the four years spent in the congenial atmosphere of the palace. He was now man grown, as tall as Miraval, stronger than Bonifaz, broad at the shoulders, narrow at the waist, and with the hope of a beard on his face. A voice in his heart answered to every throb of the springtime, and the blood ran riot in his veins.

Since early morning he had ridden with Alazais over meadows spreading soft and silent as green carpets. They had talked together of many things, though not a syllable of love was spoken. Their friendship was very intimate, and all the more precious because they never tried to measure or analyze it.

It was nearly noon when he lifted the pretty demoiselle from her horse, lingered for a last word at the doorway, and then sauntered leisurely to the stables. In front of them was a closed court used for the grooming of the horses in fair weather, but usually almost empty at this hour. Raimbaut now found it full of bustle and confusion on account of the arrival of a half dozen dust-stained, sweat-drenched animals. These were being led in a circle by the varlets, supervised by a tall squire who stood in the middle, with arms akimbo.

Raimbaut had seen much the same sight a hundred times before, but to-day he did not fail to notice the quality of the horses and the beauty of their trappings. First came a bright bay, treading gingerly and pulling at his tether; then an iron gray, less keen and eager, but showing signs of blood and breeding, followed by three blacks whose coats still showed glossy in spite of their long journey.

Raimbaut studied each one carefully as it passed him, wondering who the guests could be who rode such noble steeds. As his eye fell upon the last horse, he caught his breath, and for a moment his heart stopped beating. Ever since the sad night when he had plucked the little tuft of hair from between the fingers of his father's gauntlet, he had sought to find that horse from whose mane it had been torn. Again and again he had been startled by a resemblance which in the end proved delusive, but here at last was a red roan concern-

ing which he was certain there could be no mistake. He waited by the doorway while the horse passed him a second and a third time. It stood a full hand taller, although it was no heavier, than an ordinary destrier. Every line of its body indicated strength and speed. Evidently no longer young, there was something about the assured dignity of its gait which told of ancestry, experience, and careful training. In spite of his emotion, Raimbaut could not fail to admire the magnificent animal; and when the horse was fastened to a ring in the wall, he went to the far corner and watched the groom at work. The latter was short and swarthy, evidently very proud of his charge and quite willing to talk about him.

"It is a splendid horse that you are grooming," said Raimbaut. "To whom does he belong?"

"By Saint Isidore!" replied the varlet, "there is not his equal in all Spain, and that means the wide world; for nowhere else do they breed such perfect beasts. He was purchased by my master in Barcelona from a Moor, and he cost the price of a king's ransom!"

"I doubt it not," interrupted Raimbaut, "but you have not told me your master's name."

"It is Count Berguedan," declared the varlet, proudly, "a knight of Spain, who is, like his horse, unrivalled. He will break a lance with you in the morning, and sing his own songs by the fireside at night. He will match himself against the ablest

knight in Toulouse and the best troubadour in Raimon's palace, and make them both ashamed."

Although Raimbaut appeared to listen while the varlet told tale after tale of his master's prowess and the horse's virtues, he heard nothing but the name of Berguedan. In spite of his aversion to the suave Spaniard, and the warning of Anselme, Raimbaut had never thought of him as his father's enemy. Even now, he could scarcely believe it. He waited until the groom was stooping over a fetlock, and then, patting the arched neck, he pulled from the mane a little wisp of hair, and concealed it in the palm of his hand.

A moment later he left the varlet still boasting of the horse's virtues, and climbed the stairs to his room in the tower. It was with trembling fingers that Raimbaut opened the Book of Hours and took from it the relic, long hidden under the cover. He placed it on the table by the side of the tuft of hair which he had just secured. They were exactly alike! There was not the least room for doubt! The red roan horse in the courtyard was the very same that was ridden by Peirol's assailant. This assailant must have been Berguedan, for none other would be permitted to take the horse from his stable at the hour of dusk. Yes, the proof was complete! As the certainty of the evidence established itself in his mind, Raimbaut ceased to bend over the two tufts of hair lying side by side on the table. He lifted himself to his full height, raised his clenched

hands above his head, and muttered a something, half prayer for vengeance, half imprecation. He forgot his oath to follow in the footsteps of Saint Martin, and instead of love for all the world, his heart was parched with its fierce thirst for revenge.

He resolved that by his hand Berguedan should suffer for his injury to Peirol. As Raimbaut thought of the long years of madness that had come to his father, and of the sorrow which had hung over Vacqueiras like a black cloud, he determined that no punishment could be too severe, no suffering too intense, to inflict upon the cowardly Spaniard. He carefully placed the tuft of hair taken from Peirol's gauntlet under the cover of the Book of Hours, and with it the wisp from the mane of the red roan which he had secured so many years after. Although Raimbaut knew that even now every one was at dinner, he did not dare to enter the great hall, for fear he should betray himself. A long time he paced to and fro in his room, his mind busy with plans, none of which seemed quite adequate or possible to carry out. It was mid-afternoon before he felt quite master of himself and decided to seek out Berguedan.

When he reached the courtyard, he found it drenched with water, and although the rain had for the moment ceased, he saw the clouds were black and threatening. It was evident that all the household, and the guests as well, would be gathered in the great hall, toward which Raimbaut turned his steps. No

one noticed his entrance as he walked quietly to the recess which was his favorite spot. The company was gathered about the hearth, at one side of which stood Berguedan. From his place of vantage, Raimbaut was able to study the Spaniard, without danger that his close observation would be detected. In spite of the hatred in his heart, his first feeling, as he gazed, was one of admiration for his enemy. Taller than any man in the hall, magnificently proportioned, his attitude was full of grace and dignity. The firelight shone on features almost too regular and on lips too often parted in a smile; yet he seemed at all points the model of a perfect gallant. He was bravely apparelled; his fingers were loaded with rings, and the handle of his dagger was bright with jewels. By his side sat Alazais, over whom he was bending in a manner half deferential, half caressing, and Raimbaut did not fail to notice that the demoiselle was gay and unrestrained beyond her custom as she looked up into the Spaniard's dark eyes.

He was interrupted by Count Raimon who said, —

" While I fear to weary you, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of hearing one more song, or listening to another tale from your lips. It is long since we have been given such perfect entertainment."

Berguedan expressed gladness that his " poor talents " had received such kind recognition, and, lifting his rebec to his thigh, he struck a few random chords and then sang the same song that Raimbaut had heard long ago at Courthézon. The audience

listened spell-bound to the sensuous notes. Even Raimbaut was overborne and carried back to the Garden of Love with its rippling waters and tropical foliage. He could see plainly again the rotund Count with his bald head and watery eyes; he could see Guilhem with his mocking smile, and Touche watching sullenly from the shelter of the hedge. Plainest of all could he see the slender figure of Loba in her robe of yellow samite, as she lay stretched full length upon the grass. He remembered the dimples in her cheek, the kisses she had given him in the shadow of the arras, and even the tale she had told, her clear voice accompanied by the ripple of the fountain. He flushed as he realized the meaning of the story which he had not understood that day at Courthézon.

When Berguedan finished, and the applause had died away, Count Raimon spoke to him, and Alazais, no longer preoccupied with the handsome Spaniard, discovered Raimbaut seated in the recess. With a smile of recognition, she threaded her way through the little group clustered around the fireside, and went to him.

"Is he not wonderful?" she exclaimed. "Did you ever hear anything more beautiful than that song of Catalonia? And yet it is said that this same Berguedan won the golden cup at the tournament at Polignac, tumbling even the sullen Heraclius in the dust."

"He is indeed a famous troubadour," replied Raim-

baut, whose hatred had returned as the last note of the song ended, and with it, the spell of the musician.

"But it is the man himself that I most admire," declared Alazais. "Is he not a model for every youth ambitious to succeed as a knight and a singer?"

"Truly," answered Raimbaut, "though I confess there is much that I might learn from him, yet I would choose some other than Messire Berguedan for my pattern. I do not give much credence to idle tales; but unless he is much maligned, the Spaniard has allowed himself more license than is right for a knight mindful of his vow."

"I believe not one of them. Only a few minutes ago I told him of my belief that courtly love should be divorced from passion. In everything did he agree with me, and he spoke most beautifully concerning his own struggle to attain the 'perfect poise.'"

"I' faith," said Raimbaut, a little bitterly, "I have a knowledge of Messire Berguedan which is more than hearsay. I pray you, ask me not to join you in the praise of this man. May we not talk of something more pleasing to us both?"

As Raimbaut spoke, Alazais looked at him first with wonder, and then with an expression of disappointment, almost of disdain. She studied him keenly with her bright eyes, and inquired with a toss of her head, —

"Are you jealous? Then I must do my best to

drive away the frown which has cut two new furrows in your brow."

At this Raimbaut could not but smile, and a few moments later their heads were very close together as they bent over the table. Alazais had for a long time been striving earnestly to paint a picture on a disk of ivory. She had selected the face of Saint Love, every line of which she had labored patiently to copy. Most of all she had been troubled to reproduce the dark brown hair, which at the beginning was too glossy and too opaque. Having triumphed over this, she had struggled to catch the serene expression of the mouth which had baffled her. To-day, however, she succeeded so well that Raimbaut praised her until her cheeks flushed with pleasure. They were so intent over the work that they did not hear a footstep, until they discovered Berguedan looking over their shoulders.

" My lady Alazais," said he, his rich voice expressive of the deepest admiration, " your touch is wonderful. You are indeed a true artist. I know of but one that can equal you, and she is a pale nun in a convent, perched among the hills above Barcelona. It is said she sought the cloister after a disappointment in love, and all her soul is given to the making of pictures like this. Truly, I must congratulate you."

As he spoke, Raimbaut stood erect and faced him with an expression difficult to fathom. Alazais also rose, and acknowledging the Spaniard's compliments, was about to introduce Raimbaut to him, when Berguedan interposed.

" It is not necessary, my fair hostess, to present Messire Raimbaut. We were great friends at Courthézon, and though four years have passed and he has grown to be a fine young man, I have not forgotten him."

He was cordial, but patronizing, with an air of a man of the world condescending to notice one of less experience. Convinced as Raimbaut was that the suave Spaniard had been Peirol's treacherous assailant, it was with difficulty that he spoke a few formal words of greeting. Alazais did not notice his constraint, however, and turning to Berguedan, she said, —

" I must tell you that Messire Raimbaut, since he came to Toulouse, has found for us many beautiful songs of which we are very proud. Indeed, I believe my father would have offered him his golden spurs a year ago, had he not been restrained by a selfish fear that in doing so he should lose him as his squire."

" Truly," declared Berguedan, " I am pleased to hear you speak so well of him. I am an old friend of his father, for whose affliction I have often grieved. I am also glad to see that Messire Raimbaut has been true to his vow and still wears his severed mantle."

At the claim of fellowship with the man whom he had so treacherously assailed, Raimbaut's resentment increased; and when his vow was spoken of by one who respected neither love nor friendship, his face flushed with anger. Berguedan took the book

from the table and examined the miniatures with the air of a connoisseur.

"Are they not beautiful?" asked Alazais.

"They are not at all bad," replied Berguedan. "Amfos of Barcelona has the finest collection of missals and breviaries that can be found outside the papal palace at Rome. I wonder if he would like this little Book of Hours? It has but six miniatures, yet they are well done and the first page is unique in its design and treatment. I think it will be safe for me to purchase it. What is the price?"

"I will not part with it," answered Raimbaut, so curtly that Alazais looked at him in surprise.

"No?" said Berguedan questioningly, as he turned the leaves. "I well remember that my purse was always empty when I was a squire. I am certain I should have exchanged a Book of Hours for a hundred deniers."

"As I have already told you," replied Raimbaut, "I will not part with it."

"I am sorry you do not care to sell it for one hundred deniers," said Berguedan, "and I will give you twice the sum, which is surely more than the value of the Book."

"Again I tell you that it is not for sale," declared Raimbaut, with difficulty restraining his anger. "Amfos of Barcelona has not gold enough in his coffers to purchase one leaf of it!"

Berguedan had not quite succeeded in concealing his eagerness from Raimbaut's searching eyes. His

suspicion was aroused at the Spaniard's trembling fingers. Why did he value it so highly? Raimbaut could not tell.

" I confess I am disappointed," declared the other. "Think the matter over, and if you decide to dispose of it at a little higher price, you must not fail to tell me. May I see the binding? There seems to be some unique carving under the cover."

While he spoke, and before Raimbaut could hinder him, the Spaniard slipped the folded parchment from the Book. As he did so, there fell upon the table the two strange wisps of red roan hair. At first he did not see them, for his eyes were glued upon the medallion of Saint Martin, but when his glance wandered to the table, he started, and turned to Raimbaut. Up to this moment, he had been easy, unrestrained and confident, but now, as if a mask had been placed before his features, he became in an instant secretive, defiant. Raimbaut was pale with suppressed emotion, his eyes like searching flames. When at last he broke the silence, it was to Alazais he turned as he pointed to a tuft of hair upon the table and said, —

" You will remember that I told you on this very spot, nearly four years ago, that I kept this relic in memory of a crime and as a proof of treachery. It was taken from between the fingers of my father's gauntlet on the night when he received the foul blow that made him witless. This other by its side, I plucked with my own hand to-day from the mane of

Messire Berguedan's red roan destrier, which is even now standing in the stables."

Raimbaut had scarce finished, and indeed was about to charge Berguedan directly with the crime, when the Spaniard interposed. On his face there was no shadow of guilt, and he spoke without the least accent of anger or resentment, as if in answer to a petulant child.

"I am willing to excuse an affront from Messire Raimbaut, remembering his youth, the suffering of his father, and my old friendship for him. More than this, I am willing to explain where I should resent, did I not recognize the sincerity of the young man, and some slight foundation for his suspicions in the likeness between the two tufts of hair. I was, I admit, at Courthézon at the time that Peirol received his hurt. The red roan, then a colt, I left with a farmer where the horse could get green pasture, for he was too young to be useful in the lists. I speak frankly, concealing nothing, in the hope that we may find a clue to the cowardly assailant. Whether some wicked knight bribed the farmer and rode the horse on his evil errand, hoping thus to conceal his own identity, I cannot tell. Perhaps Peirol, riding about the country, got the mane entangled in his gauntlet as he patted the horse's neck. This is not unlikely. Whatever the truth, I am sure you will believe me when I swear I am guiltless of any part or lot in this treacherous deed."

RAIMBAUT WAS PALE WITH SUPPRESSED EMOTION

The Spaniard spoke so plausibly and with such an air of innocence that Alazais, who had listened to them both, and to whom they had both appealed, considered for a moment, and then, turning from Raimbaut with an expression of mingled scorn and pity, said, —

" I am sorry that any guest should suffer from such an indignity in my father's palace. I am doubly grieved that the injured one should be a famous knight and troubadour whose presence we so highly value. More than all else do I regret that Messire Raimbaut, in whom I have placed a special confidence, should so far forget himself as to be guilty of the affront. I am sure he already looks upon his conduct with shame, and, upon reflection, will make reparation by a prompt apology. Shall we leave him to his thoughts and join my father at the fireside? "

Scarce looking at Raimbaut, Alazais took her departure, followed by Berguedan, who did not conceal a glance both malicious and triumphant.

Raimbaut replaced the cover on the Book of Hours with the tufts of hair resting side by side, put it into the pocket of his tunic, and went out into the courtyard, not knowing whither he walked.

CHAPTER XV

BERGUEDAN THE CATALONIAN

For the first week of his stay at Toulouse, Berguedan basked in the warm sunlight of popular favor. Only Bernart was unsympathetic, and his dislike was ascribed to a very natural jealousy, for the old troubadour was almost neglected. The squires, too, received scant attention, and to Berguedan alone the court was eager to listen.

An added dignity was given to the Spaniard's visit, from the fact that he was an envoy of Amfos of Aragon, who, next to Raimon, was the most generous patron of the troubadour art. For this reason, Berguedan's reception was doubly cordial, and his entertainment lavish beyond the custom of the munificent Count of Toulouse. The Spaniard came with the prestige of a treaty just arranged between his master and Louis of France, and it was whispered that he planned to negotiate with Raimon also for an alliance.

At the beginning, everything seemed propitious, and the ambassador rode on the top wave of popularity. Miraval and Folquet imitated both his songs and manner, and even Bernart admitted that, although the Spaniard was over-fervid and spectacular, there was much to learn from him in the way of dramatic action and vocal interpretation.

So Berguedan ruffled it bravely about the palace, impressing the ladies with his air of gallantry, distributing a word here and glance of devotion there as if they were royal largess. His assumption of superiority was so natural that it was not questioned, and his patronage so graceful that for a time it did not give offence. Even Raimbaut was not openly antagonistic, though only closed lips could restrain the bitter word, and clenched hands the angry blow. He did not fail to notice that, in spite of the ever-present smile on the Catalonian's face, his eyes were always sinister.

On the very day of his meeting with the Spaniard, Raimbaut had shown Bernart the tuft of hair, and told him of his experience. He had reached the room drenched to the skin, for he had stood like a post in the courtyard, heeding not the April shower. As he drew the wet mantle from his shoulders, his fingers had come in contact with the frayed corner, but the touch brought to him no memory of his vow. Bernart had listened patiently to the very end. When he spoke, his voice was full of mingled sympathy and warning: —

" I have little doubt of the Spaniard's guilt; yet only God knows the whole truth. Leave the punishment to Him."

" But," replied Raimbaut, smiling bitterly, " this villain has been permitted to walk the earth in joy and comfort for eight long years, while my poor father has been suffering at Vacqueiras."

"Yet God does not forget," declared Bernart. "I have seen so many plans for human vengeance miscarry, that I have come to doubt them all. Have you no thought of your consecration to a life of love?"

"When Heaven itself smiles upon the guilty, it can be no sin for man to avenge a foul wrong. Even the saint to whom I have sworn devotion has not interposed. By the Heaven in which I still trust in spite of its neglect, I will wring the neck of this fiend, though the Devil, his master, stand by his side."

He spoke with such intensity of feeling, that for a moment Bernart was silent, and then said again very solemnly, —

"To God, who makes no mistake, leave the punishment of the wicked."

Raimbaut made no reply, but went about with a gloomy brow. He looked forward eagerly to the return of Bonifaz, who was absent on a visit to Polignac, for in this crisis it was his bosom friend to whom he could best go for advice. Although the young Count of Monferrat was now a knight, the receipt of his golden spurs had only strengthened the friendship between himself and Raimbaut, and they planned brave deeds when, side by side, they should ride out into the world as comrades-in-arms.

The change in Raimbaut was so pronounced that every one at the palace wondered. They saw no longer the young man with a pleasant word and a

hand ever ready to do a kindly act. He became so moody and reserved that one day Miraval whispered his belief that Raimbaut had inherited Peirol's sullen madness, and was going in the same path as his father.

It was with Alazais, however, that Raimbaut's experience was most trying and most bitter. The little demoiselle summoned him to the recess in the great hall on the morning after his meeting with Berguedan. She was very friendly, very sympathetic, and she talked with him as kindly as if there were no cloud over their fondness. On one thing only she insisted, and that was that Raimbaut should make a proper apology to the guest he had offended. This Raimbaut firmly declined to do. It was the first time that he had disobeyed her and Alazais was deeply hurt. For his own sake, she was anxious that he should do what was right, and she labored patiently to convince him of his duty. It was only after a long hour that she began to despair. Sadly she exclaimed, —

"To think that after all these years our friendship should be jeopardized by such a trivial thing! It is useless to argue with you. Give me your last word."

"My last word," replied Raimbaut, "is that I cannot act the hypocrite, nor pretend aught but hatred toward this Spanish villain."

Alazais' patience, already sorely tried, gave way.

"'Villain,' say you! Messire Berguedan is the most famous troubadour of Spain, and a knight renowned through all the world for his prowess in the lists."

"I grant you this, and more. He is no less famous as a libertine, without conscience toward God, without respect for women, without honor among men."

"You speak but hearsay," declared Alazais, with disdain, "you who have not yet won the right to be called either troubadour or knight."

"Though I have accomplished little good, no harm have I done. At least my life is clean. There is not the mark of the beast on my face. Only last night this Spanish gentleman defined a virtuous woman as 'one who lacks opportunity'! In the armory, before a score of knights and squires, he boasted that there was no woman in wide Provence able to resist him; yet not a man rose to challenge him for the honor of his sister, wife or sweetheart! I should have smitten him on his lying mouth had it not been for the fear of increasing your disfavor, already heavy upon me."

Here Alazais interrupted, but Raimbaut would not be silenced.

"His least touch is profanation; yet when he greets you, his lips linger longer and longer on your cheek."

"It is but the common kiss of courtesy," replied she, indignantly.

"A kiss of courtesy it may seem to you, yet to him

it is something more. I have seen the passion in his eyes. When he lifts you to your saddle, his hand clings to your foot. When he adjusts your robe, his fingers touch your knee. You notice it not, for your heart is too pure to understand. Yet I predict that some day you will think with shame of every glance you have exchanged with him."

"You are mad with jealousy!" declared Alazais, rising to her feet.

"I do not deny that I am watchful of you as I would be of a sister, were she in the presence of this satyr," replied Raimbaut. "Be on your guard against him! If you trust not me, ask Bernart what he thinks of the beast you have championed."

"Enough!" cried Alazais, her face ablaze with anger. "You warn me as if I were a tire-maiden or a peasant-girl. The daughter of the Count of Toulouse needs no teacher of manners, and no guide as to what honor demands of her."

With these words she left Raimbaut, and he knew that he had only deepened the shadow which hung over him. So the days passed, and although they were both sick at heart, neither made any effort toward reconciliation. Each went a separate way, Raimbaut avoiding not Alazais alone, but his enemy as well, being doubtful of his power of self-restraint.

There were signs that the Catalonian's popularity was on the wane. He had been too invariably successful with the dice not to cause resentment. At first abstemious, each night he drank deeper, and

became more coarse and boisterous. More than aught else did he offend through his gallantries. Husbands became less complaisant, and lovers began to mutter angrily under their breath. Only the favor in which he stood with Raimon protected him. Even this was questioned, when the black frown on Berguedan's brow and the expression of weariness on the pale face of the Count, hinted that the Spaniard was not succeeding in his mission.

It was at this time that Raimbaut one day discovered Miguel, Berguedan's giant squire, ill-treating Guilhem. He had the little fellow's slender wrist in his huge hand and was twisting it, vastly amused at the boy's writhings. At the sight, Raimbaut's smouldering anger burst into flame. He seized a helmet, and threw it with such true aim that it struck Miguel on the side of the head, felling him to the floor; and it was a half-hour before the bully quite regained consciousness. The Spanish men-at-arms grew more and more out of hand, and scarce a day passed without some brawl.

At the end of the second week, Berguedan was himself guilty of a most undiplomatic act which deeply offended Count Raimon. The Spaniard knew well the story of Raimon's injury and his aversion to all contests in the lists; yet one day he donned full armor, mounted his red roan destrier, and rode into the tilt-yard before a little knot of spectators gathered on the weather-stained seats. Up and down the lists he galloped, stopping in an instant, and whirling about

as if on a pivot. A whisper, a touch of the hand, or the pressure of a knee, was sufficient guidance. The horse would stand as if carved in stone, or would come at his master's call and follow at heel like a dog. Most wonderful of all, Berguedan, having filled a flagon with wine, held it high above his head, and rode at half-speed through the long grass: yet so easy was the gait of the red roan that not a drop was spilled! Great was the admiration of the knights and squires, who could well understand that, with a destrier so perfect, the Catalonian was able to place his lance-thrust where he willed.

The very day after his exhibition of skill, Berguedan went to bathe in the river. He was returning to the palace, following a winding path through the woods, when he suddenly came face to face with a very pretty maid. She was evidently a laundress, for with her walked Jacques, carrying a huge bundle of soiled linen on his head. Berguedan stepped aside to allow Jacques to pass, for the path was narrow. The comely Marie had courtesied pleasantly and was passing also, when she found her way barred by the Catalonian.

"Not so fast, my little beauty! I must tell you that good Count Raimon has appointed me keeper of this path, with power to impose toll: to wit, one kiss from every wench who passes!"

At this Marie, placing her hands upon her hips, looked up at the huge cavalier with a flash of fire in her black eyes, tossed her head, and replied, —

"You must show me your parchment with the grand seal of Toulouse. I would rather kiss your red roan, which has a handsomer mouth than you."

The words were scarcely spoken when Berguedan caught her in his arms. Jacques threw his bundle of linen on the ground, but before he could interfere by word or act, the Spaniard gave a cry of pain, and Marie, tearing herself from the loosened grasp, ran swiftly down the path, only turning when she had reached a safe distance.

"Ha! Ha! Messire Toll-Taker!" she cried, laughing mockingly. "Instead of a kiss I have left marks on your face which will be a warning to all maids who come after. If they pay the same toll as I, you will think a tournament child's play compared with toll-taking!"

Her victory was so complete that her assailant contented himself with cursing her as a "cat, whose claws should be cut by the headsman." Indeed, Berguedan was in a sad plight, for Marie had buried her sharp nails so deeply in his cheek and drawn them so fiercely through, that she had left four red scratches from which the blood streamed. In spite of careful nursing, the marks on his face were plainly evident when he appeared at supper. Alazais was the first to notice them and express solicitude.

"It is a mere nothing," replied Berguedan. "I was lifting my hauberk from its place on the wall when it slipped, and the steel links tore these furrows. I am properly punished for my awkwardness."

" A pretty tale it is," declared a young chatelaine at the end of the table, "but I have seen such marks before! I will wager my best girdle against your baldric that nought but a maid's finger-nails made them."

There were suppressed smiles in which even Raimon joined, and a tall young knight by the side of the little chatelaine laughed heartily, until he caught the fierce glance of Berguedan. The latter had risen to his feet; his voice trembled with anger,—

" I have stated that the scratches on my face were made by the links of a hauberk. I hope I am too good a courtier to take offence at a lady's merry jest; but if there be any man here who contradicts me, I warn him he shall find use for his sword, instead of wearing it as an ornament — the custom of Toulouse.

To this the knight made no reply, for however eager he might be to face the Spaniard, he feared to brawl in the presence of Raimon. And yet the Count was strangely quiet; he said not a word to smooth the controversy. It was Alazais who made apologies to their angry guest, and who devoted herself assiduously to make him forget his resentment. Indeed, it was she who, when the last course was served, complained of the heat and suggested that Berguedan should walk with her in the garden.

They had just vanished through the doorway when Bonifaz entered the hall. Every one was happy to see the young Count of Monferrat, and cordial was the greeting which he received from Raimon.

"I am well pleased to have you return to Toulouse," declared the Count. "I hear that you won great honor in the lists at Polignac, but I hope you will not be discontented in my peaceful court. You shall tell me of your adventures. Let us go into the garden, and Raimbaut with us, which will save the labor of a double telling."

The sun had set, the shadows were beginning to gather, but the sky and the river still reflected the dying light. They had hardly taken a dozen steps and Bonifaz had barely started his recital, when he was silenced by a shrill cry from the far corner of the garden. It was a strange, almost inarticulate call, and at the sound, Raimbaut sprang forward, followed closely by Raimon and Bonifaz. It was but a few steps to a seat beneath the arching branches. Here they found Alazais, her face distorted with rage and disgust, wiping her lips with her hand as if some deadly poison were upon them. On the other side of the path stood Berguedan, his hand upon his dagger, his attitude one of mingled shame and defiance.

Raimon was first to break the silence.

"What has happened?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

Berguedan, ever ready, was about to reply, when Alazais, with a gesture of utter loathing, broke in, —

"He has embraced me! He has pressed his lips to mine! Would I could wash them with hyssop! One thing only can atone for my dishonor. This beast must die! Who will kill him for me?"

" I claim the right," cried Raimbaut eagerly; and forestalling Bonifaz, he struck Berguedan full in the face with his clenched hand.

The Spaniard's smile changed to a scowl of deadly hatred. He whitened to the lips.

" By the blood of Christ! " he stammered, " you crow lustily, my little cock, knowing right well that your station protects you from my sword. Were you knight, instead of a starveling squire, I would gladly spit you like a fat squab on the point of my lance. Your master will exempt you from the punishment which would follow at any court other than this nunnery of Toulouse! "

The blood rushed into Raimon's pallid face until the veins in his forehead seemed like to burst: a startling anger in one so gentle. He sprang at Berguedan as if he would have struck him, and three times he tried to speak, but rage choked him. At last he said almost in a whisper, —

" I would not forget what is proper between host and guest, nor measure with a grudging hand the courtesy due you, Count Berguedan. For two long weeks I have declined with unwearying civility the persistent demands made upon me. You have hinted that I lack courage, and that I turn a deaf ear to the call of friendship because I side not with Louis against Henry of England. Were my hand strong enough to handle lance and sword, I should challenge you here in the garden where we stand."

" Yet Toulouse lacks not a knight to champion

her," declared Bonifaz, who had been restraining himself with difficulty while his master spoke. He was about to defy Berguedan with his glove, when Raimbaut caught the uplifted arm.

"No, Bonifaz! This is my quarrel. None shall take it from me."

He turned to Count Raimon.

"Eight years have passed since this villain struck the blow that made my father witless. I have sure proof of his guilt. I declare it openly. I call upon the judgment of God to prove me right or wrong by the test of arms."

He threw himself on his knees before his master. For a moment only Count Raimon hesitated; then he struck the bent neck of the squire with his clenched hand.

"Raimbaut of Vacqueiras, with this blow I dub thee knight! Prove always brave and true."

He had hardly finished when Raimbaut rose to his feet and gave Berguedan so fierce a buffet that the blood spurted from the Spaniard's mouth and he staggered against the hedge.

"The last was a blow from the hand of a knight," cried Raimbaut eagerly. "You have no choice. You cannot deny me now."

"By the nails of the Rood! I have no dearer wish than to find you within reach of my sword," growled Berguedan. "I will meet you to-morrow in the tilt-yard, an hour after the rising of the sun. Twice have you struck me. You shall not live to

boast of it. Twice have you accused me of treacherous attack upon your father, and I will prove that I am guiltless. You, who have fought only with a dull lance and blunt sword, shall be given a contest with sharpened steel. If you have any sins unconfessed, take heed that you clear your bosom of them, for I swear you shall die before to-morrow's sun climbs the heavens."

With a black look of defiance at the three men and a mocking smile at Alazais, he disappeared with long strides down the winding path. When he had departed, Raimon turned to Bonifaz.

"Tell me, what chance has Raimbaut against this giant Catalonian? It will be small solace for our wrongs to have him pierced by our enemy's lance, or carved with his blade."

"I confess," replied Bonifaz, "that I wish Raimbaut were to meet a man less powerful. With the lance he has had no more practice than a few bouts with me. In sword-play I do not think even Berguedan can equal him, if the Spaniard's size and strength be not too great an advantage. Truly, I believe the contest is not hopeless."

"Indeed," declared Raimbaut, "I have little reason to expect any honor from this encounter. Yet there is a foolish something in my heart that tells me I shall humble this blackguard knight."

"Alas!" exclaimed Alazais, "it is my fault that Messire Raimbaut risks his life to-morrow! Had I not been so certain of myself, and turned a deaf ear

to his warnings, all this trouble would not have come upon us. And yet Heaven must help the right!"

"If the right, or a stout heart only were needed," declared Bonifaz, "I should have no doubt for Raimbaut. These are not enough, however, with which to meet a seasoned champion: too well do I remember the strength of Berguedan's arm when he tumbled me in the lists at Polignac. Yet do I believe in the help of Heaven when the scales hang not in too uneven a balance."

As he spoke, Bonifaz put a caressing hand on Raimbaut's shoulder.

"Now, get you to bed and have a good rest. I will wake you in good season. You may trust us to make every preparation for the conflict."

Raimbaut was about to take his departure when Alazais drew a blue scarf from her neck and said, —

"Wear this to-morrow as a proof of my trust in you; and remember that all night long I shall not cease to pray.'"

CHAPTER XVI

THE VELVET LISTS

THE gray dawn, creeping through the window, found Raimbaut wide awake. It was not a growing consciousness that came to him, but a sudden complete realization of the day's ordeal. He sat upright in bed, wide-eyed, alert. The far corners of the room were still shrouded in darkness, and there was not the least sign of life from Bonifaz, who slumbered peacefully. Raimbaut was possessed by an almost overwhelming feeling of isolation and loneliness. As the day brightened and the birds began to call sleepily one to another, he rose silently and went to the window.

The fresh breeze of the morning blew damp and chill on his bare throat. The river stretched below, darkened here and there by ripples where vagrant zephyrs played. The meadows never looked so green nor the sky so blue, and the flush of dawn seemed like the hue of heaven itself. It was a beautiful world indeed: doubly fair if one must leave it!

All night long he had been haunted by horrible dreams. By some strange freak of fancy, it was again Touche, the wolf-hound, the embodiment of evil, against whom he struggled wearily during the long hours. The four years at Toulouse had been so luxurious that he had almost forgotten there were such things in life as strife and danger. Yet, natu-

rally courageous, with his first waking breath he cast away all thought of fear like a useless garment. He was considering the day's ordeal as calmly as if he had no part to act in it, when Bonifaz awoke and, catching sight of him, shouted, —

"Come away from that window, or you will be stiff with the cold!"

He sprang from his couch, insisted that Raimbaut should not lift a finger to dress himself, and was hurrying into his clothes, when there came a knock at the door, and Jacques appeared, his heavy eyes proving that he had passed a sleepless night. His greeting was almost feverishly cheerful as he placed the breakfast on the table. Bonifaz commanded that Raimbaut eat heartily, in spite of his lack of appetite.

When the meal was over, Bonifaz went to the wardrobe, took from it a hauberk and slipped the rattling garment over Raimbaut's shoulders. The steel links sent a chill to his very marrow as the camail was drawn over his head, but he cried out with wonder and admiration, —

"I have never felt the like before! It weighs scarcely more than a heavy mantle. Can it be possible it is proof against a sword-stroke?"

"It will turn the edge of a battle-axe," replied Bonifaz. "The links are of the finest steel, and there is a triple mesh over the shoulders, breast, and neck. It is the Count's own coat of mail, made by a celebrated armorer of Milan and worth its weight

in gold. Notice how this helmet is inlaid, with the face-piece so welded that it has a double strength. Your own iron pot is twice as heavy, but will never turn a sword-stroke so surely."

When Bonifaz had laced the helmet on Raimbaut's head, he brought from the chest a sword with a jewelled hilt, and a baldric covered with gold. But at these Raimbaut shook his head.

"No! Not an ounce of extra weight do I wish to carry. I will keep to my old Cordovan leather, which is soft and supple; neither will I exchange my good Toledo blade. The armor will be a prize rich enough, should Berguedan vanquish me. Does Count Raimon realize that weapons, horse and armor belong to the victor?"

"He knows this right well," replied Bonifaz, "but declares nothing must be denied you in the whole palace. He is loaning you the black destrier which the Count of Beziers gave him last week. He is a splendid animal, almost equal to Berguedan's red roan. I am sure you are right to keep your own sword; you know its balance perfectly, and its blade would stand the test of Charlemagne's steel staircase. What think you of this shield?"

"It is too heavy," answered Raimbaut. "This smaller one is better."

"I am afraid of it," said Bonifaz, examining it critically. "The frame is too weak, the leather thin, the rim over light for such blows as come from Berguedan. I cannot advise you to put your trust in it."

Raimbaut pondered for a moment, and then replied, —

" If I stand still for Berguedan to reach me, there is no shield strong enough. My one chance for success is through my quickness, and a heavier shield would only make me slow and helpless."

" Again I am not sure but that you are right," declared Bonifaz, although he still shook his head doubtfully. " You are like young David who overcame the giant Goliath. Until midnight, I talked with Count Raimon and good old Bernart. They agreed with me that you must meet the Catalonian with some of his own craft. You are no match for him with the lance; the sooner you take your tumble and draw your sword, the better. Even then you must at the beginning keep away from him, and trust to wear him out. Above all things, be on your guard against a stroke three hand-breadths longer than you think. It is this tremendous reach of Berguedan which has been the undoing of many a stout knight. If you are on your feet and strong at the end of a quarter-hour, have no doubt of your success. It is the first fierce onslaughts that I most fear. You have not strength to stand before them and exchange blows. I pray that you may keep all this in mind: your very life may hang upon it."

To these instructions Raimbaut listened intently, and then turned to Jacques, from whose face the assumed cheerfulness had long ago departed. His eyes spoke plainer than words: " I must impress upon

my memory the features of the friend whom I shall never again see in life!" He threw his arms around his master's neck and clung to him so closely that Raimbaut was forced to break away from him, declaring, —

"Never you fear, my good Jacques. You shall see me come riding back within the hour on Berguedan's red roan, with his armor rattling from my saddle."

With these merry words he followed Bonifaz down the stairs. Here they found Miraval holding the black destrier with one hand, and Bonifaz's huge gray with the other. Folquet stood by his side with three tall lances on his arm. A moment later they were clattering out of the courtyard.

To Raimbaut, who had heard so many tales since early boyhood concerning the brave sights at tournaments, the empty lists seemed melancholy enough. There was no blare of trumpets as he rode in, no blaze of bright colors to greet him, no bevy of fair ladies bending forward from their high seats, no eager crowd shouting aloud at his entrance. Not a soul was in sight. He looked over a sea of waving grass as high as his horse's knees. Bonifaz dismounted and tightened Raimbaut's saddle-girths, until he could not gain another inch. Then Folquet came up with the lances. Bonifaz selected one without a flaw and handed it to Raimbaut.

At this moment Count Raimon arrived, attended by Bernart, a herald, and two surgeons, lay brethren from the monastery. They took their stations on the

east side of the lists, facing the centre, where the combatants must meet. The Count, pale and anxious, stopped in passing to say, —

" Nothing but your success will excuse me for my part in this affair. Yet are we in honor bound to go through with it. May good Saint Martin give you strength and courage! Forget not how David, who was weaker than you, overthrew the giant Goliath, who was larger and stronger even than Berguedan."

As he passed on, Raimbaut, in spite of the seriousness of his position, could not avoid turning to Bonifaz with a smile.

" First you, and now the good Count himself, have dragged in the old Scripture story. I' faith, I am like to drop my lance and take to a sling with five smooth stones from the brook, if that tale be told me again! "

For several minutes they waited. Count Raimon glanced repeatedly at the south entrance, near which Raimbaut and his party were stationed, till there came a clatter of hoofs outside, and Berguedan rode bravely in, with Miguel and two men-at-arms. They were all richly apparelled. It was evident from Berguedan's look of surprise that he expected a gathering of onlookers. In truth, he had delayed his entrance for the sake of effect, and was keenly disappointed to find no crowd to greet him. As he passed Raimbaut, he gave him a keen glance, which took in every inch of his equipment.

" Sorry am I," said he, " to keep you waiting, my

Lord of Vacqueiras; but we will endeavor to entertain you well, now we have arrived."

Then, with a smile on his dark face, he rode up to Count Raimon.

" I regret that there are so few present, this beautiful morning. The conditions are perfect, save for the long grass, which may somewhat impede our movements. Still, it will furnish a soft cushion to the one who is unhorsed. I am averse to the sight of injuries, which sometimes occur even in little affairs like this. I confess that I am disappointed there are no bright eyes to inspire us, and no poets to sing the fame of the Velvet Lists."

Raimon bowed gravely and said, —

" Count Berguedan, I have given my consent to this encounter only because of great provocation, and in the heat of a just resentment. It shall not be made an occasion of glory or pageantry. At the sound of the trumpet you shall run the first course. If neither is unhorsed, you shall return and engage again. When one falls, the combat shall be finished with the sword. Three blasts of the trumpet shall be the signal that the struggle is over. You shall have neither more nor less than fair play; and may God defend the right! "

To this Berguedan waved a graceful assent, and his little cavalcade rode to their places at the north end of the lists, about a hundred yards from where Raimbaut sat his horse, awaiting the ordeal before him. Bonifaz caught his breath with an audible gasp as

he stood with one hand on Raimbaut's knee. Miraval muttered nervously; the lances in Folquet's hand rattled together like castanets. Only Raimbaut seemed self-possessed. He settled himself in the saddle, placed his lance in rest, and bent forward, ready for the signal.

Count Raimon's face grew gray with anxiety as he watched; and he was about to give the word when he saw the stern expression on Berguedan's countenance change to a smile of amusement. Following his glance, Raimon discovered that Folquet, in his excitement, had dropped one of the lances from his trembling hand upon the flanks of Raimbaut's destrier, and the latter, lashing out and plunging, had nearly unhorsed his rider. This had startled Bonifaz' gray charger, who pulled the Lord of Miraval off his feet, and made Folquet jump nimbly aside to escape the flying heels.

In sharp contrast to this confusion, Berguedan sat his horse motionless; and the red roan, although every muscle under his satin skin was tense, seemed carved in stone. Behind him stood Miguel with the two men-at-arms, as smiling as if they were watching the performance of a troop of joglars. Even when Raimbaut's destrier was under control, Berguedan still laughed, loath to give up his enjoyment of the comedy. At last he turned to Raimon.

"My good Count, we are ready, if the riding lesson be over."

At these words so full of mockery, Bonifaz's eyes blazed and he hissed, —

" 'Sdeath! You must humble him! Win the red roan and ride him back to Vacqueiras! Remember your father! "

Fortunate was it that the sound of the trumpet came on the instant, for a flame of fury took possession of Raimbaut. He sunk the spurs in his destrier's sides and was off like a flash, tearing through the long grass so madly that even Berguedan, riding a perfect course on the red roan, was disconcerted. His spear, striking Raimbaut's shield a hand-breadth to the side, glanced off and was not broken.

Raimbaut was so mad with rage that he barely touched Berguedan's shield, and was only able to stop his destrier at the high barrier. With the rush of the cold wind against his cheek, however, his reason came back to him. As he cantered to his place again, blind fury changed to an anger no less intense, but clear-eyed and deadly. Every faculty became acute. Again he studied the chances of the combat. Plainly his only hope was to fight on foot, and with the sword. His plan was made at the second blast of the trumpet.

This time he rode a steady course, holding his horse well in hand. Just before the rivals came together, Raimbaut loosened his feet in the stirrups; and when his opponent's lance-point caught his shield fairly in the centre, he was swept off like a leaf

by the autumn wind. He fell with scarce a sound, almost hidden by the long grass, while his riderless horse galloped on and disappeared through the open gate at the end of the lists.

Berguedan laughed insultingly as he swept past Bonifaz, Miraval and Folquet, standing together silent and disconcerted. He pulled the red roan back on his haunches, and, turning about, tossed his useless lance into the air, drew his sword and dismounted, close to Raimbaut, now struggling to his feet.

For a moment they faced each other, the grin of confidence on Berguedan's visage widening. So careless was he that his shield lay loose on his arm, the point of his blade close to the ground, when Raimbaut suddenly sprang forward; his sword flashed in the sunlight, and bit deeply into the giant's left shoulder.

Berguedan struck back savagely, furious that he had allowed himself to be tricked; but his opponent was well out of reach and eager for another chance to sting. At this a cheer went up; " Noël for Raimbaut! Noël for Vacqueiras! " The color came back to Count Raimon's cheeks. He turned to Bernart and said, —

" To good Saint Eloy I vow a chapel in the church of Saint Sernin, if he bring us victory this day! "

Miraval's countenance was wreathed in smiles, and Folquet's teeth were chattering with excitement.

" It is but the beginning of a long journey," declared Bonifaz, his face set. " Raimbaut has a lead

which it will be difficult for Berguedan to overcome, for he has no longer his red roan to help him."

Bernart looked anxiously from one combatant to the other. It was a different Berguedan now: an experienced knight, cautious and deadly, who stood and studied his antagonist. His face wore at last a savage earnestness. He paid no attention to the red wound on his shoulder, but glaring over the top of his shield, approached Raimbaut warily through the long grass.

For a moment Raimbaut's heart almost failed him as he realized the size and strength of his opponent. He was glad to obey instructions, keeping away, circling slowly about, waiting for his enemy to strike.

Berguedan, following with eyes as cold and keen as the edge of his blade, suddenly sprang forward. Raimbaut, lithe and active, leaped back, as he thought, well out of danger. He had not allowed, however, for the prodigious reach of his antagonist, and received a stroke on the top of his shield which cut through brass, wood, and leather a full hand-breadth. Moreover, the blade stuck for a moment in the gap, and Raimbaut was able to reply with a quick stroke at Berguedan's sword-arm. To the onlookers it seemed a mere touch, but it cut through the meshes of the hauberk, and Raimbaut could see the red drops spurting.

Again they circled about, each waiting for the

other to attack. It was a test of patience, in which Berguedan, still angry that he had been outwitted, proved the weaker. In spite of his agility, Raimbaut found himself forced back into the clogging grass, fairly within reach of his powerful opponent, who rained blow after blow upon him. When at last he staggered into the trodden circle again, beyond the reach of Berguedan's long blade, his shield was so shattered that it seemed like to drop in pieces from his arm.

"Alas!" exclaimed Bonifaz, "I shall never forgive myself for sending him into the contest with so weak a buckler."

"I fear me there will be no new chapel to Saint Eloy!" declared Raimon sadly.

Though Raimbaut's friends were beginning to despair, to his heart there had come increasing confidence. He was certain that the "quarter-hour" had passed which Bonifaz had feared. He now understood thoroughly his own powers and those of his antagonist. He knew that he was no match for Berguedan at close quarters, and that his only hope was to strike and get away. This had been difficult at first, because of the grass and weeds which twined around his feet. Now, however, there was a circle which had been trampled down, over which he could move with ease. He had not realized the tremendous length of Berguedan's arm, but he need not be caught unawares again. He began to take full advantage of his quickness. He evaded Berguedan's fierce rushes;

he stepped aside to avoid the sweep of the long blade; again and again he delivered his blow and made off without a return.

To the others they seemed to do no harm, but Berguedan knew better. Every stroke of the Toledo blade cut through the meshes of his hauberk, and from these little wounds his strength was being slowly drained. He was breathing with difficulty: his careless living had weakened his powers of endurance. The penance which Nature imposes upon all who break her laws was heavy upon him.

Raimbaut could feel the power and speed of his opponent gradually diminish. He could see the light of confidence dying out in Berguedan's eyes, and the sweat-drenched face grow haggard. So sluggish had the Spaniard become that Raimbaut, ignoring his instructions, no longer stepped back, but fought foot to foot.

This was what Berguedan had long been hoping for. Making no effort to guard himself, he summoned all his powers and struck back fiercely at Raimbaut. It was a magnificent blow, sweeping through the broken shield and catching the side of the helmet. An inch lower, and the contest would have ended! The blade nicked the curve of the morion just high enough to break the ancient lacings which fastened it and sent it rolling in the grass.

At this there was a loud cry of, — "Noël! Noël!" from Miguel and the Spanish men-at-arms.

"Alas!" said Count Raimon sadly, "it is a black

day for Provence. Would I might order the trumpet to sound and save our Raimbaut!"

"Why did he forget himself?" exclaimed Bonifaz, in an agony of regret. "Why did I fail to put fresh thongs on the helmet?"

Berguedan, elated by his success and wishing to take full advantage of his opportunity, pressed, hot-foot, upon his enemy, who stood bareheaded and with a shattered shield upon his arm. But the latter had become so useless that he flung it from him, and faced Berguedan with no other defence than his sword. For a full minute he gave an exhibition of skill at which even Miguel could not but exclaim. He had scarce been harmed during the long struggle. The stroke that swept the helmet from his head had left no injury but a slight cut on the forehead, from which the blood trickled. His good hauberk had not been pierced. The joy of the conflict possessed him; there was a smile upon his face.

Berguedan, on the other hand, was now almost spent. He stood like a bull in the arena. He no longer attacked, for he felt his strength slowly ebbing. He could not restrain the trembling of his sword-arm. His feet were like lead. There was a haze over the bright sunlight, and a ringing in his ears. His lips were parched, his heart throbbed painfuly. What troubled him most was that his shield had grown so heavy he could scarcely hold it to the level of his chin. His left arm was numb, and for a moment, all unconsciously, he dropped his shield a hand-breadth.

Raimbaut saw his opportunity. Summoning all his strength, he struck, cutting through the steel links as if they were paper. The blood followed in a torrent; Berguedan staggered as if about to fall. Yet again he raised his shield, and again it dropped from sheer exhaustion.

Now was the time for the final blow. Miguel watched for it with half-averted face. The Count and Bernart waited, scarce breathing. Miraval muttered an oath; Folquet, on the ground, whispered a prayer. They saw Raimbaut's lifted arm, they saw the flash of the blade in the sunlight. But it never fell; it hung arrested, as if by some unseen power.

"Strike!" cried Bonifaz.

"Smite! Spare not!" called Bernart, in a querulous voice.

Raimbaut dropped his sword, point to the ground, and stood quite still. Berguedan expected the blow, conscious that he could not guard it, certain that it must mean death. But when he saw the blade rest harmless on the ground, into his glazing eyes there came a gleam of hope. Snarling like a wild beast, tottering with weakness, he tried twice, thrice, to strike at his unresisting foe. It was too late: he had not the strength to lift his arm. The sword dropped from his nerveless hand, as with a great sob he fell full length upon the grass at Raimbaut's feet.

With the thud of the huge body on the ground, there came three blasts from the herald's trumpet. In another instant Raimbaut was surrounded by his

friends. Bonifaz was the first to reach him, his face radiant with joy. Miraval and Folquet each caught him by the hand; Bernart embraced him with tears in his eyes, and Raimon declared in a voice trembling with emotion, —

" To holy Saint Eloy will I give his chapel, and to you naught that I possess shall be denied. Choose what you will."

As the Count spoke, Raimbaut slowly came to himself as from a trance.

" Saw you a vision? " he asked eagerly.

"We saw nothing," replied Bonifaz. "Why did you spare the traitor? The world would be well rid of him."

" Heard you aught? " inquired Raimbaut, looking from one to the other almost wildly.

" We heard nothing strange or wonderful," answered Bernart. " What mean you? "

" When Berguedan was at my mercy and I about to strike the death-blow, there came to me a strange impulse of pity. It was as if an unseen hand caught my sword and held it, as if Saint Martin interposed to save me from mortal sin. Yet have I broken my vow, for there was murder in my heart."

He stooped down and took first one and then the other spur from his heels. He handed them to Count Raimon.

" I disclaim all rights of knighthood," he said. " Never again will I wear golden spurs, until I have won them by some deed untarnished by hatred and revenge."

CHAPTER XVII

LOBA OF CABARET

RAIMBAUT'S renunciation of his knighthood was so solemn and so determined that no one ventured to remonstrate. Upon his face there was a rapt expression; even Miraval looked at him with awe and wonder.

When Raimbaut finished, he turned to Berguedan, who lay, stripped to the waist, his head in Miguel's lap. His body was covered with wounds where the Toledo blade had cut through the links of the armor. One only was serious, the others having served to drain the giant's strength and to bring on the weakness which resulted in his final overthrow. The surgeons bent over him, using all their skill to staunch the blood which gushed from the last deep gash. At last one of the monks rose to his feet.

"I have a faint hope for the knight's recovery," he said. "We will carry him to the monastery close at hand, and do for him all that is within our power."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Raimbaut, looking down upon his unconscious enemy.

There had come to him a vague feeling of regret at the work of his own hands.

"Tell me, good Brother," he asked, "is there aught we can do to help you save this man?"

"There is nothing," replied the monk. "Indeed,

you had best leave us, for the Spaniard is likely to regain consciousness and must not be excited. His life hangs but by a thread. Before you go, let me make sure that you yourself have come to no hurt."

"Nay," declared Raimbaut, "I am no whit harmed, and am ready to ride away on the instant."

In spite of his protests, however, Bonifaz and Miraval stripped him of his hauberk and padded shirt, drenched with sweat. There were marks on his left arm, a number of contusions on his shoulder, and a bruise on his breast where Berguedan's sword had struck hard; but not once had the good armor of proof failed to turn the blow. On his forehead only was there any flow of blood. As he stood in the bright sunlight, with the fresh wind blowing on his bare body, he was like the statue of a young Greek god. There was no over-development, no swollen muscle or knotted sinew. Every line indicated the lavish strength and energy of youth. He would not even consent that the surgeon touch his bruises, as he hurried to re-arm himself. Replacing Alazais' blue scarf in the helmet from which it had fallen, he looked about for his horse. The black destrier was not in sight, and his eyes fell upon the red roan, standing motionless close at hand. He inquired of Count Raimon, —

" Does my enemy's horse now belong to me? "

" By the law of arms his horse and armor are yours, though it is the custom for the squire of the defeated knight to deliver them to the victor."

Raimbaut smiled a little bitterly.

" I hope I shall not be discourteous if I save Miguel his labor and take the destrier now when I need him most."

He walked to the red roan and mounted with difficulty, for his muscles were beginning to stiffen. His heart throbbed with exultation as he drew rein on the horse of which he had dreamed so often. The strain of the contest had been greater than he realized. It was only by the exertion of all his will-power that he sat upright in his saddle and rode swiftly from the lists, followed by Bonifaz, with Count Raimon and Bernart on either side.

They found the courtyard crowded. News of the encounter had reached the palace, for in spite of the Count's prohibition there had been many spectators hidden behind the palisades, peering through the gaps of the shrunken boards. As they entered, the place rang with shouts and cheers. From every side came cries of, —

" Noël for Raimbaut! Noël for the Sire of Vacqueiras! "

He made his way through the crowd, dismounted at the entrance of the palace, and climbed the broad steps. Here on the platform the ladies were gathered to greet him with smiles and congratulations, among them Alazais. She found herself strangely at a loss as Raimbaut stood before her.

Now the people became impatient, and at their insistent calls Raimbaut turned to look upon a sea of

flushed faces. He drew himself to his full height and lifted his helmet from his head. His cheek was pale, his lips black and parched, his eyes bloodshot. On his forehead was a little splash of red, whence blood was trickling. He looked like an artist's vision of Saint George, new come from his conquest of the dragon. He tried to speak, in a brief silence, but his words were drowned in the uproar. The people, the walls, and the horizon spun around him in a dizzy flight, and glad was he when Bonifaz, noticing his condition, gave him a shoulder and helped him through the crowd to the door of the tower.

Raimbaut did not see a cavalcade of strangers, although he passed almost near enough to touch them. They had ridden into the courtyard on the very instant that he mounted the steps. They were covered with the dust of the highway and startled by the surging throng. First had come a lady riding a cream-colored palfrey, with a slender cavalier at her elbow, followed by six stout men-at-arms. It was evident they were people of consequence, for their garments were rich and their horses sleek and well-caparisoned. Unable at first to discover the reason of the excitement, they paused near the gateway where there was an open space. The lady, who was closely veiled and clad in a long robe which completely concealed her figure, exclaimed in a clear voice, —

" Ho! What have we come upon? A wedding or a hanging? Shall we keep by the gate, ready for flight, or press boldly forward? Is it a celebration

of the Count's birthday, or an insurrection, putting our lives in danger?"

At this moment Raimbaut turned toward them, the sun shining full on his pale face and splashed forehead. There was a deafening cry of, —

"Noël for the Lord of Vacqueiras!"

"I' faith!" exclaimed the lady, "'t is the lad we saw at Courthézon: the little squire of the gaudy mantle, grown a man."

She touched the shoulder of a stout merchant, who stood apart from the crowd.

"Tell me, my good fellow, what is the reason for this gathering?"

The man, turning hastily and with a tradesman's instinctive recognition of quality, removed his hat and bowing low, replied, —

"My lady, it is Raimbaut, the young Sire of Vacqueiras, who has this morning won a notable victory in the lists over Berguedan the Catalonian. We are all pleased at his success. A favorite is he, though he bring no gold into our coffers. It is his first deed of arms, but he is a notable singer, and has found many good songs which are sung in the streets of Toulouse. He will some day take the place of Bernart, who is growing old. I pray God he may not be led by this success to exchange his lute for a sword!"

"Indeed," said the lady, "so pray I also, though I care not overmuch for song. There is many a blithe youth spoiled for love by this silly habit men have of hacking each other to pieces."

There was something so free and almost familiar in the words of the lady, that the merchant looked at her keenly, as if in doubt that he had classed her aright. He needed not a second glance, however. From her closely fitting head-dress, under which there hung two long braids of gold-red hair, to the tips of her pointed shoes, there was not a discordant note. Her voice, too, although she spoke so freely, had the indescribable quality which no woman of doubtful class could counterfeit. She listened eagerly when Raimbaut tried to speak, and cried, "Noël to the Lord of Vacqueiras!" with those around her.

When Raimbaut was led away by Bonifaz, she pushed through the crowd to the steps and saluted Raimon and Alazais.

"Good-morrow, my Lord of Toulouse! Have you no greeting for your poor guests cooling their heels and burning their faces at your gateway for an hour or more?"

At her first gay word, both Count Raimon and Bernart hurried down to her. While the latter assisted her to alight, the former overwhelmed her with apologies.

"By Saint Eloy, there is no one more welcome than the beautiful lady of Cabaret! We are overjoyed at this visit, so long deferred. Ask Alazais how often we have spoken of you. Sorry am I that your marriage made you so long forget your old friends."

At this Alazais intervened with a smiling word.

"I would not be lacking in courtesy, my good

father, but I must warn you that this same Countess of Cabaret has won the hearts of all the men in Languedoc: striplings and grandsires are alike her slaves. Bid her be merciful before she enters here!"

By this time Loba had reached the topmost step, and embracing Alazais, kissed her again and again.

"God knows," said she, "how little chance I have, with you in sight, to win a glance from any man! I shall have leisure for my devotions here in Toulouse, for nothing else will be left to me."

They entered the doorway, and while the men talked together over their flagons of wine, Alazais hurried her friend to her own room. Here the tire-women removed Loba's dust-covered robe, wimple and heavy girdle, unlaced her tunic, and drew the shoes from her weary feet. They effaced the stains of travel with spring water, slightly warmed, and one of them, having unfastened the fillet, was about to loosen the long braids, when Alazais dismissed her with the others.

"Loba!" she cried, "none other shall touch your hair. I wonder has it grown since the old convent days? Then my greatest joy was to act as your tire-maiden."

She unbound the thick tresses, standing on the tips of her toes to reach them, and gave an exclamation of wonder and admiration as they fell in shining waves over the white neck and shoulders.

"Truly," said Alazais, touching them lovingly, "they are three hand-breadths longer."

"Yes," replied Loba, "I am sorry to say they are three hand-breadths longer, and more than a third heavier. On a day like this I am tempted an hundred times to cut them. Truly, I was ready to die of heat and fatigue. Rest is all that will save my life."

She kissed Alazais carelessly on the forehead and threw herself on the cool white bed. Stretching her long body deliciously, she made a pillow of one round arm, and closed her eyes with a deep sigh of perfect contentment. In spite of the shock at seeing her fresh coverlet so ruthlessly crumpled, Alazais seated herself on a fauteuil by the window and said not a word, while Loba fell asleep as quickly as a tired child.

For a while Alazais watched, her mind full of the memories of her convent days. Then she began to nod, not having closed her eyes the previous night, and in a few minutes she also slept. For a long hour there was no sound in the room except the hum of voices and the clatter of hoofs in the courtyard below.

Loba woke first, and lifting herself on her elbow, discovered Alazais sitting bolt upright before her on the tall fauteuil, her head resting against the carved oak, her hands folded in her lap, her feet resting at an equal angle on the cushion, and her face calm and placid. She was a pretty picture. Loba studied her lovingly, yet a little mockingly, till under the steady gaze, Alazais stirred uneasily, and then woke with a guilty start.

"Did I really fall asleep?" she asked.

"Why, no!" replied Loba laughingly. "I am sure

you would not have been so rude, and I a guest arrived within the hour! You are like good old Sister Geneviève. Do you remember how she used to claim she was lost in meditation, when the whole convent echoed with her snores? Does it seem five years since we had our lessons with her, and breathed out long confidences to each other under the trees in the garden?"

"It is like yesterday to me," replied Alazais. "Tell me about yourself since the day you left the convent, when my eyes were so swollen with tears that I could scarcely see your blurred shadow disappear down the road!"

"It is little enough I have to say," Loba began. "I married within the year and went to Cabaret, as you know. My husband has a twin brother with whom he shares the domain. This brother has a wife, who, being passing ugly, must needs be pious. She loves me not; and though I have my way in spite of her, I find the unremitting struggle something of a burden. So Cabaret sees me only when I lack pleasant invitations to visit elsewhere. This, thanks be to God, seldom happens."

"I should think there would be trouble between your husband and his brother. Tell me about Jourdain. I know he cannot help but love you."

"Jourdain is the one precious pearl of husbands," she declared solemnly. "He has not his equal in all Languedoc. I grant you he is not so brave as Roland, so wise as Godefroi, nor as handsome as young Raim-

baut; yet truly, I would not change for any of them. He does as I bid him, and denies me nothing. Better than all else, the more gallants I have at my elbow, the more he seems pleased!"

"Truly," said Alazais, "I am not sure that I should like his double for myself. While I could not love a jealous husband, neither would I have one too complacent."

At this Loba laughed.

"Tell me, sweet sister, what would you for a husband? Every young girl has her ideal. Do you hope to find him in the Count of Beziers, to whom you are betrothed? If reports be true, he cares not to share any of his possessions with his neighbor, and will insist on keeping even his wife's smiles to himself."

Alazais gave a little sigh.

"I must confess he is not all to my liking, but one cannot chose as can a peasant girl who selects the lad that pleases her. When my father and the Count of Beziers became reconciled after their quarrel, it was agreed that our marriage should be the pledge of continued friendship. My father says that the Count is a just man, and will be kind to me. I can hardly expect more than that, and must remember that through my marriage I am bringing an assured peace to many people."

"But," persisted Loba, "if you were quite free to choose, if you were a peasant girl in the vineyard, you would take a different man, would you not? I wonder, would he be like Raimbaut? How hand-

some he looked with the sun shining in his face, the touch of red on his brow!"

"If I could order a man to please me," replied Alazais, "I certainly should make some changes in Messire Raimbaut. When he came to us from Vacqueiras, he was as untrained as a goatherd from the hills. He was not already spoiled like Miraval, nor unattractive like Folquet, nor wholly wrapped up in the hopes of knighthood like Bonifaz. He had been taught arms, had learned to read the langue d'Oc well and Latin easily. I have taken great pains to train him, and he has been an apt pupil. But he is far from perfect. I have no delusions about him."

"Faith, I would not mind giving him a few lessons myself," declared Loba. "I am not sure just what he would learn from me, but I should relish that teaching well. He would be safer in the hands of a kind old lady like myself, being much too handsome for a castle where there is a young maiden with a susceptible heart. I warn you I shall take him with me to Cabaret, unless you really love him! Ask me to leave him to you, and I shall do nothing but frown upon him!"

As she spoke, Loba, in spite of her laughing speech, watched Alazais keenly from under her long lashes, and did not fail to notice a touch of color and a slight start at the mention of her plan.

"I have no love for Raimbaut," answered Alazais proudly, "and no liking that would make me heartsore should he leave me. You are welcome to him,

if he choose to go with you. It is understood that he shall come to Beziers after I am married; but I am willing to waive all claims to him."

Loba opened her eyes very wide, and shook her finger warningly.

"Beware, mademoiselle, that you tell me the whole truth, for I shall take you at your word. Let no silly pride keep you from confession."

"Loba," declared Alazais, piqued at such persistence, "I have nothing to confess."

"And it is a wonder, too, for you have lived these four years with this handsome youth at your elbow. You will pardon me if I tell you it speaks not well for your taste? I am an older friend, so it was doubly good of me to allow you the prior claim which you did not care to take. Long ago we were in the Garden of Love at Courthézon, when Raimbaut suddenly appeared, resplendent in a mantle of bright colors. The Count showed a strange friendliness for him; nor were such likings common to the fat old baron, who loved himself to distraction. The boy disappeared as quickly as he came, after a struggle with a wolf-hound which he slew. At his departure the Count was almost crazed with grief and died that same night. There were many questionings by those who knew the old Count's gallantries. I missed the boy sadly, for I had lost half my heart to him."

"I must tell you," said Alazais, lifting her head a little assertively, "that I am one who does not at all believe in the 'losing of hearts,' the 'passion of

love,' or 'an inclination' beyond the power of the will and reason to control."

She poised herself a trifle more aggressively on her high seat and assumed an air of authority, very much to Loba's amusement. The latter had been reclining on the couch in an attitude of careless unrestraint. She now turned and faced Alazais, her chin resting on the palm of her hand, and listened attentively to the homily, —

"Many of us forget that 'joy' and 'young-heartedness' become license, unless indulged in moderation and held by the leash of restraint. It is one of the faults of this Messire Raimbaut, whom you think so perfect, that he is not open to reason on this point, though often have I argued with him. He believes that when a grand passion comes to us, or, as he calls it, 'Perfect Love,' we should give ourselves up to it without reserve. He says that God is Love and Love is God. I claim that we should avoid any impulse and resist any feeling likely to overcome us: that we should always hold ourselves in the 'bond of mesura.' Tell me, why cannot a man and woman have a friendship for each other without spoiling it by silly thoughts?"

"That question I cannot answer, my pretty Alazais. But since the world began, I believe a bond like this has never lasted. Your 'friendship' between man and woman either warms into love, or cools into indifference."

"I grant you," replied Alazais, "that this is not

possible among peasants, or between some coarse baron and careless demoiselle. With Raimbaut and myself, however, it has stood a four years' test, and I see no reason to doubt its continuance. Passion is like a hot fire that quickly burns itself out. I can love sincerely and truly, but never so strongly as to lose my self-control."

"That the saints keep you in this mind, is my heartfelt prayer!" said Loba. Rising from the couch, she stretched her long arms above her head. "Enough of Raimbaut and enough of love. Tell me, Alazais, when are you to be married?"

"The marriage is planned for October," replied Alazais, a little disappointed in having a subject changed, concerning which she plainly had more to say. "I have already many pretty things gathered together in my wardrobe, which I shall enjoy showing you."

"Let us take the first rainy morning," replied Loba, "for now I must go to my room and have my bath so that I shall be ready for dinner. Think you Messire Raimbaut will be there? For if he is, I must wear a new robe to make a good impression!"

"I think he will scarcely appear before supper. He was completely exhausted, and is probably good for a ten hours' sleep."

"Then very simple attire will do, since there is no other man here I care to please. You are sure you do not mind if I make an effort to attract him, my dear Alazais?"

"I am quite sure, my sweet Loba."

CHAPTER XVIII

MOON MADNESS

RAIMBAUT found himself very stiff and sore when he awoke in the late afternoon. For a long time he lay still, not caring to stir, his mind full of memories. He could see his father's squire examining the gauntlet in the red glare of the fire-light. He could hear his exclamation, "There is the clue!" as he pointed to the tuft of hair caught between the steel-backed fingers. And now the red roan horse on which his father's enemy had ridden was his very own. Even the armor which Berguedan had worn was forfeited to him. It was all very hard to believe. He was wondering if it might not be a dream, when he noticed a rustling in the corner of the room; then Jacques came to the side of the couch. When he discovered that his master was awake, he fell on his knees and embraced him again and again.

"Tell me that you are not hurt. Since early morning I have mourned and suffered as if you were really dead."

"And yet," replied Raimbaut, "did not I tell you that you should see me ride into the courtyard on the red roan, with my enemy's armor rattling from my saddle?"

"Berguedan's harness hangs in the corner," said Jacques. "You have made sad havoc with the

hauberk, which is cut in a dozen places. It is unfortunate," he continued, a smile lighting his face for the first time, " that in order to win an opponent's armor, you must first spoil it."

" Indeed," declared Raimbaut, " I had little time to think of that when I stood within reach of the Spaniard this morning. The saints be thanked that I came out of the conflict alive!"

Although unwounded, Raimbaut was scarce able to stand when he rose from his couch; but a cold bath and a good rub down by Jacques relieved him greatly, and he found himself well able to dress.

When he entered the great hall for supper, it was evident that the Count had arranged to pay him special honor. The room was crowded with guests, the floor strewn with flowers, and the harps and viols playing a triumphal strain. Every one rose and shouted, " Noël to the Sire of Vacqueiras!" The seneschal ushered him to a seat between Alazais and the Countess Loba, only one place removed from Raimon himself. Near him was the Count of Cabaret, pale and slender, with the vacant smile which Raimbaut remembered so well. Loba, on the contrary, had changed greatly since the day she laughed at the boy with the severed mantle in the Garden of Love at Courthézon. The lines of her girlish figure had ripened into perfect womanhood. There were still a few freckles on her forehead, but none on her shoulders or breast, which gleamed white as those of the foam-goddess herself. Beautiful as was Alazais,

the Countess of Cabaret lost nothing by comparison. After the first words of greeting and congratulation, Raimbaut turned to Alazais, who said, —

"Thank God you are safe and sound to-night!"

She was so plainly struggling with her emotion that Raimbaut, to give her an opportunity to compose herself, turned to Loba on his left. She was talking to Count Raimon with a charming assumption of injury.

"And have I not good reason for complaint? I ride into your courtyard on my cream-colored palfrey, bravely apparelled, with my husband at my elbow and six good men-at-arms behind me. What is the greeting I receive?"

"Truly," replied Raimon, "no reception could be adequate for so beautiful a guest."

"Well, let me tell you," continued Loba, "that I find a surging crowd crying, 'Noël to Raimbaut!' and not a single word of praise or welcome for me. Not one 'Noël to Loba!' do I hear."

"My regret overwhelms me!" exclaimed Raimon.

"Then I learn from a stout merchant in the crowd that the Sire of Vacqueiras has won a notable victory in the lists over Berguedan the Catalonian. The merchant also tells me that this same Raimbaut has a voice like a nightingale, and finds songs equal to those of Bernart himself. Now let me ask, why did this valuable young man exchange his lute for a sword, and run the risk of having his throat cut and his sweet voice stilled for ever?"

At this, in spite of his wish to be jocular, the Count grew grave as he said, —

" God knows that it was with great reluctance that I allowed the combat to take place. I promise you there shall not be such another while I reign here in Toulouse."

" A good resolution," answered Loba. " Men should remember that over every gay youth spoiled for love, there is a woman who mourns. I say woman, but there may be more than one. Some of these young men have large hearts and can win the affection of many. For this same Raimbaut, whom you allowed to fight to-day, I must confess that I have long had a tenderness. Indeed, I told him four years ago, that, had I not been pledged to Jourdain, I would gladly have waited for him to grow a man."

She was now so evidently talking for him to hear, that Raimbaut interposed.

" If the noble Countess still loves me, we will draw lots whether she is to flavor her husband's wine, or I am to stumble against him on the edge of a parapet."

At this cold-blooded suggestion Loba turned to Raimbaut, and not to his regret, though he lost the sight of her red braids and the line of her rounded neck and shoulder. First remarking to Count Raimon, " I hope he has not heard too much of my conversation, for young men are easily elated!" she changed her mocking manner and said, " Messire Raimbaut, I never doubted we should meet again, although you left us so abruptly at Courthézon."

" I remember that I neglected to bid you farewell; but truly, my thoughts were of none but you as I climbed the wall. Had I dreamed you were so devoted to me I should have remained, though death itself threatened."

" Well-spoken! A smooth speech indeed! I confess I like it; though I know you gave me no thought. Have you ever heard what followed your departure?"

" No single word has come to me, though often I have wondered. All I know is that the good Count of Courthézon died suddenly. May he rest in peace."

" Amen: So may all Christian souls," echoed Loba, settling herself comfortably in her chair. " I have looked forward to telling you this tale in some secluded spot, undisturbed by the din of dishes, the shuffling of servants and voices of ten-score people. I had dreamed of an arbor in a garden like that at Courthézon where we first met."

" There is a green bower," interrupted Raimbaut, " here in the garden overlooking the river. Shall I meet you there to-morrow after None? "

At this bold suggestion, Loba's eyes flashed merrily, but she answered with an assumption of primness, —

" What, meet a young man in an arbor? Never! Unless I bring Jourdain with me. I am much safer here. Well do I remember the night you ran away from Courthézon. We were at table. The Count was with us, looking like a corpse after his week's

illness. I was telling my story of the were-wolf of Lastours. At risk of seeming vain, I must say I do this passing well! There was a dead silence in the hall, so that naught could be heard but my own voice and the crackling of the fire on the hearth. As I paused for effect in the thrilling part, where the wolf sat up on his haunches under the blasted pines and told the poor peasant girl he was her long lost lover, there came an awful shriek which fairly froze the air about us. It was followed by the sound of flying footsteps drawing nearer, and Guilhem tore through the leather curtain at the door, rushing down the hall, overturning a servant laden with empty platters, and threw himself at the Count's feet, clinging to his knees in an agony of fear. His cheeks were like chalk and his eyes protruded like those of a gargoyle on the Church of Saint Sernin. His teeth chattered so he could scarcely speak, and only after I had grown impatient and given him a good shaking, could he gather his wits together and tell us that he had found a fiend of hell grinning in his bed! He confessed he had but a moment's glimpse of the interloper, for he had dropped his torch on the floor. He was certain, however, that the fiend wore a mantle of fire, had a yellow face with a mouth that opened to the ears, and teeth like the tusks of a wild boar."

" Indeed," declared Raimbaut, " I can see the picture as if it were yesterday. Touche and the mantle are alike memories which Time cannot dim."

" At Guilhem's tale," continued Loba, " there was

great consternation. Those of the ladies who had pleasant table companions swooned on their shoulders, and those who had only graybeards at their sides showed their terror by screaming lustily. I was sure the boy was only suffering from an evil dream, and promptly declared my willingness to pay a visit to the chamber, in spite of the presence of Satan. So a few of us (and truly some of the stouter knights remained behind) climbed the winding stairway to Guilhem's room in the tower. I was first to enter, but when the torches cast their flickering light on the bed, I confess that for once in my life I was thoroughly frightened. My heart stood still and my knees trembled with terror. Oh, the gruesome sight! Touche's glazed eyes looked straight at us, her mouth was open as with a grin of malice, and your mantle on her shoulders was like an infernal flame. The young Baron of Jonquieres was so panic-stricken that he threw down his torch, and stopped not until he had reached the dining-hall. He lost a shoe at the top of the stairs, and rolled all the way down. The men who had courage to stay with me drew back the coverlet, pulled the long body out of the bed, and examined the gaping wounds as the corpse lay on the floor. We could not understand what had happened or what the terrible masquerade meant. Finally Guilhem was brought up and forced to confess that he had left you shut up with Touche in the tapestry-room. He also recognized the dagger still sticking in Touche's ribs as yours."

"It was a toy weapon," said Raimbaut, "and I was resolved there should be no uncertainty as to who had slain the wolf-hound."

"Then we tramped through the long corridor, and God knows my heart was full of forebodings. The haunted room told its story as plainly as any book. The tapestry was covered with splashes of blood and pierced by a dozen dagger-thrusts. There was evidence of a terrible struggle. Where had the boy gone? Was he torn by Touche before he killed her? Our fears were quieted by the suggestion that any one who could drag a huge beast like Touche up the steep stairs could not have been much injured. When we returned to the hall we found Count Raimbaut collapsed in his chair. Strange to say, however, it was not fear of the devil that possessed him, but anxiety concerning your fate. His fat body was convulsed with sobs and his round face wet with tears. On hearing our story, he relieved himself by cursing Guilhem until he had exhausted both his stock of oaths and his breath. I really feared for the man's life, for he was in no condition to undergo such an ordeal. Indeed, he seemed aged a score of years when he was taken to his room. His last words were to order that the castle and village should be searched, and if you were not found, the country for miles around must be explored. He never learned the result of the quest, for his own soul departed ere the dawn. — Tell me," inquired Loba, looking at him keenly, "why did the Count bring you to Courthézon?

Why was he so anxious for your return? Do you know he offered one thousand deniers for you safe and sound, and five hundred for your worthless body? "

Raimbaut had listened spellbound to the sequel of his adventure with Touche. He answered, " I have not the slightest inkling to the Count's liking for me. Dear lady," continued he, laughing, " you seem to forget what a universal favorite I am. But in all seriousness I tell you that I am sorry I repaid the old Count's kindness so poorly, and that I had no chance to speak with him again."

All this time Alazais had seen nothing of Raimbaut but his broad shoulders. She had been forced to turn to a young baron who regaled her with a long tale concerning the virtues of a colt which he was training. Compared with this brown colt, he assured Alazais, the red roan was but a plough-horse.

When Loba ended her story, she engaged in a duel of wits with Count Raimon. Alazais, however, kept her back rigidly turned to Raimbaut, though thereby she invoked upon her head an explicit recital of the colt's pedigree, with interminable descriptions of the merits both of sire and dam.

Raimbaut realized that he had been neglectful, and was touched with remorse. He devoted himself assiduously to bring back the smile to Alazais' pretty face and finally succeeded. They talked together in low tones or with glances that needed no assistance from words, till interrupted at last by Loba.

" My dear Alazais, these flowers are beautiful, but

their odor is oppressive. If I swoon, I hope my long body may be carried out as decently as possible, and that my feet and ankles may not be too conspicuous."

"You are right," replied Alazais, with solicitude. "The scent is overwhelming, and the room is hot. Messire Raimbaut will take you to the garden for a little while, and on your return you will find all the casements open."

As Loba rose from her seat there were many expressions of concern, but she answered languidly that she only needed a little air. Leaning on Raimbaut's arm, she was followed by admiring eyes to the half-open door, through which she disappeared: a vision of loveliness.

The moon was at the full, the sky almost as azure as at noonday, and the wind fragrant with the odor of the orange-blossoms. The garden was still and shadowy, but splashed with moonlight even in the far corners by the ivy-covered wall. The paths wound white and gleaming between the hedges, and the branches were stirred by a light breeze from the river. Somewhere among the leaves a nightingale was singing, the notes throbbing as if his breast were really against the legendary thorn.

For a moment the two stood in silence. Raimbaut did not care to speak, and what was in Loba's mind, she did not tell. She seemed weak, and Raimbaut was about to lead her to a seat, when he suddenly found himself among the branches of a hawthorn

bush, and caught a glimpse of Loba's light robe as she ran swiftly down the moonlit path and disappeared at the first curve.

It was several seconds before Raimbaut realized that he had been unceremoniously pushed into the bush, although he was spurred to his feet by the thorns. There was no sound now in all the garden. He hurried down the path, looking keenly to right and to left as he passed, and came at last to the margin of the river. Back again he turned, following the shadow of the wall, until he heard a cry which seemed to rise from the dense shrubbery behind him.

He turned quickly and ran back at full speed, but could find no trace of Loba. Again and again he followed her call and the sound of her footsteps. Once he caught a glimpse of her; but when he reached the spot, she had disappeared as if by magic. At last, made wise by failure, when she called to him, he ran only a few steps and returned quickly to the place which he had left. Then there was a dove-like flutter and Loba flew straight into his arms. She made no attempt to escape, but leaned heavily on his shoulder, quite out of breath. Raimbaut held her contentedly until she drew a long sigh and freed herself from his embrace.

"I' faith, madam," declared he, "for one so faint and languid, you have led me a merry chase."

"I confess that I never felt better in my life. It was deadly dull at table, and I was tired of the stuffy room. Perhaps I wished to have you to myself a

little while. I think, too, the moonbeams took possession of my senses. Now I must put myself to rights and we will return. I am sorry, however, to inform you, Messire Raimbaut, that we have remained already a fatal five minutes too long in the garden. I warn you, every woman in the hall will look doubtfully at me, and some of the men will envy you."

This prophesy was fulfilled, for when they entered the room, there were many who noticed Loba's bright eyes and Raimbaut's flushed cheeks. Alazais observed that one long red braid was half unplaited, the tresses hanging loose; yet she greeted her friend cordially, with expressions of pleasure at her recovery. When affairs had settled themselves, Count Raimon rose and said, —

" This day leaves me with conflicting emotions. I have broken a vow sacred for many years. I have looked upon two men in deadly combat, and one of them lying wounded near to death. On the other hand, I have seen the proud humbled and knighthood refused because of a high ideal. Messire Raimbaut has fought to-day for the honor of Toulouse. I believe he was right in refusing his golden spurs. Yet he must not deprive me of the privilege of bestowing on him the armor in which he fought and the horse on which he rode. To these I have added a sum of gold for his free use. He has grown to manhood among us and won the respect of all. I pledge his health to-night: I bid you drink to the honor of Raimbaut of Vacqueiras! "

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHOICE

THE month that Loba spent in Toulouse was not soon forgotten. At the end of the first week she knew every man, woman and child in the palace, and called each one familiarly by name. The chatelaines eyed her a trifle doubtfully, as they thought of their susceptible husbands, and the demoiselles were jealous of her influence over restive lovers; but the children followed her devotedly, and the men became her slaves. From Count Raimon to his tiniest page, no one could resist the magic of her smile, which Miraval in a chanson declared was "warmer than any other woman's caress."

"Truly," said she one day when there were a dozen men about her, "I think my heart is large enough to love you all — a little."

She chatted with the graybeards, coquetted with the gallants, and took possession of every man in the palace save one. Only Bonifaz withstood her. Never greatly interested in women, he disliked Loba from the beginning. Quick to notice his antipathy, it became a source of never-ceasing amusement to her. Whenever possible, she distinguished him by attentions which made him ridiculous. As for the other squires, their infatuation was pitiful. Of Loba they dreamed, of Loba they thought every waking

hour. Many were the songs written in her praise. Each finally devoted himself to putting a serenade to music, and one fine evening Guilhem appeared in the garden under her window. The next night came Miraval, who was followed by Folquet, the order of the appearance having been decided by lot. Each of the young gallants was rewarded by a smile and a red rose dropped from her casement. All having been granted the same modest favors, there was a heated debate: which had received the warmest smile and the largest rose? Careful examination proved that the finest flower had undoubtedly been given to Guilhem, but the degree of graciousness in the smile was of necessity left an undecided question.

Encouraged by their reception, the three squires decided to try their fortunes again; but when on the fourth night Guilhem reappeared, Loba took no notice of him. The little fellow retired almost in tears, much to the gratification of his rivals. When Miraval, however, made his second sally, Loba looked down upon him as he gave the last touch to his lute, and with a voice in which were accents both of amusement and annoyance, said, —

"My dear Count of Miraval, you sing like Philomel! Your attention flatters me — but you keep me awake. Unless I get my beauty-sleep I shall grow worn and haggard, and you will no longer love me. In the name of good Saint Cecily, go back to bed and let me rest in peace."

This ended the serenades and the garden fell silent,

save for the notes of the nightingale. One evening, after supper, they were gathered in the hall, when Loba, feigning a sorrow which was contradicted by the dimple in her cheek, declared, —

"I have reason to believe that Messires Miraval, Folquet, and Guilhem are not unfriendly, but I fear Messires Bonifaz and Raimbaut do not return the love I bear them. Not once have they sung to me, though for a full fortnight I have waited to hear their charming voices. There is no moon this evening, but the stars are bright, the air is mild, and I have prayed my patron saint that I may hear one of these 'ungallants' before I lay my cheek upon my pillow."

At this there was much gay laughter, Bonifaz and Raimbaut being rallied on all sides.

"If you do not despise an old man's song," declared Bernart, "I myself will sing to you and put these young men to shame!"

"There is not one of them to compare with you!" replied Loba. "You have a better voice and redder blood in your veins; but as I do not doubt your devotion, you shall not risk the damp earth nor the night wind."

Even Count Raimon offered his services, but Loba shook her head.

"You have shown your affection for me in a hundred ways since I came to Toulouse. I need no song to prove the love you bear me."

A little later came the torches, and Loba followed

them with a glance full of provocation at the recreant squires. When they were alone, Raimbaut said to Bonifaz, —

"Surely we have been lacking in courtesy to our guest. Shall you, or I, serenade the Countess Loba to-night?"

Bonifaz replied decisively, —

"You shall have that honor; for not one word of praise have I in my throat for her. What will you sing?"

"I do not know," replied Raimbaut, looking into his friend's face with a challenge in his voice. "I have nothing good enough for so gracious a chatelaine."

"Gracious she surely is," declared Bonifaz. "I' faith, her favor is a whit overwhelming."

He would have said more, but, catching the flash in Raimbaut's eye, he shrugged his shoulders, and went off to bed, swearing under his breath. In spite of their friendship, Loba's presence had from the beginning been a source of discord between the comrades. Raimbaut resented Bonifaz' dislike, and Bonifaz, seeing clearly the impression that was being made upon his friend, had not helped matters by his efforts to disillusionize him.

Raimbaut's admiration was all the stronger for being held in leash. It was partly because of Bonifaz's antipathy, partly because of Alazais' silent influence, and partly because of his own doubt of himself after his experience in the garden, that Raimbaut

had, up to this evening, made no effort to approach Loba. His blood cried out for her, but his soul bade him beware, and the remembrance of his vow was ever with him. Indeed, his hand often wandered to the frayed corner of his mantle as if it were an amulet.

When Bonifaz left him Raimbaut went to his room, took his lute from the corner, and hurried down the steps. Loba's window was in a little tower jutting out into the garden; and under it he took his stand.

The night was very quiet. The sky showed black in the light of the stars, and the wind scarce stirred the branches over his head. For a moment he waited, and then, with a single chord on his lute, he sang so gently that even the nightingale in the hedge was not silenced.

"Into thy window the young May moon
Is smiling with delight;
Into thy window floats the tune
The river trills to-night;
Into thy window the bold wind creeps,
Kissing thy cheek, while my lady sleeps;
I can but sing to thee!

"Into thy window the garden sends
Sweet perfume, and the rose,
Climbing the bars of the trellis, bends
With every wind that blows;
Into thy window the red rose peeps,
Gazing at will, while my lady sleeps;
I can but sing to thee!"

Looking up, he saw Loba's face dimly in the darkness.

" ' I can but sing to thee,' say you, Messire Raimbaut? Are you sure? You cannot float through my window like the sound of the river and the perfume of the garden, for your shoulders are broad, and alas, Count Raimon has fixed these iron bars. Yet you may climb to me if you dare, and gaze into my room if you choose. It pleases me not to hear so charming a gallant warbling ' I can but sing to thee.' "

This was an unmistakable challenge; and Raimbaut, dropping his lute, began at once to climb the wall. It was difficult, but the ivy grew thick and strong, and he was soon gripping the iron bars and staring into the dark room. Loba had retreated into the shadows, where he could not see her. Now she approached, pale and silent as a ghost, her eyes like stars. Then bending over him so closely that he could breathe the fragrance of her white throat, she pressed her moist lips to his. At their touch the blood leaped in his veins, and he pulled fiercely at the bars as though he would tear them away. Then he grew so weak with rapture that his fingers loosened, and he fell with a swish through the ivy leaves to the garden below.

With a little shriek of horror Loba leaned out of the window; but Raimbaut had fallen on the soft earth, and, rising quickly, cried out, —

" I am not hurt; I have not a single scratch."

" It is the first time I have known a man to throw himself from such a height to escape my caress," replied Loba. " By my troth, Messire Raimbaut, I will never kiss you again."

At this he started to mount the wall once more, but she forbade him.

" No!" she exclaimed, " I care not to buy Masses for your soul. Wait awhile. When you come to Cabaret you will find no bars to my window."

No open breach lay between Alazais and Loba, but their rivalry was not less real because it was concealed. In spite of her declaration that the Countess of Cabaret was welcome to Raimbaut if he chose to leave Toulouse, she was not willing to give him up without a struggle. She was doubly charming now that she forgot a little the dignity of her position. She chose a new robe as blue as her eyes, and a wimple to add to her height. She even wore some of the garments folded carefully in her bridal chest, and a jewelled girdle, in spite of the discomfort.

In Raimbaut's heart there was a conflict, the issue of which he could not himself foresee. On the one hand were loyalty, sincere affection for Alazais, his vow, his dream of a Perfect Love. On the other was a growing passion for Loba. In the quiet of his room it was easy to decide that he cared most for Alazais, and that he could ask no kinder fate than to sing her praises at Beziers. In the presence of Loba, his reason left him, so intoxicated was he by her beauty. Yet when she laughingly declared, " Messire Raim-

baut, I shall take you back with me to Cabaret," he did not answer.

One day Alazais had spoken seriously of the future.

" Messire Raimbaut, we have often talked about your joining the household of the Count of Beziers, but I have never formally invited you. I now have the consent of my betrothed husband to say that we shall both be happy to have you come to us."

Raimbaut had replied, —

" Sweet lady, you have made me all I am. A life devoted to your service would not be sufficient recompense."

" But you must not come to me because of gratitude," she had answered, a little coldly.

So the weeks passed until the last day of Loba's visit dawned, and preparations were made for departure on the following morning. Raimbaut realized that he could no longer postpone the question over which he had been so long struggling. He went with Alazais to Saint Sernin. He knelt by her side, and after Mass returned with her to the palace. Not a word was spoken concerning the thought which was uppermost in both their minds — that this might be their last walk together.

Raimbaut spent the morning with Bonifaz and the hawks, returning in time for dinner. Then he went to his room and labored patiently over a sirvente, though his mind wandered and he made little progress. It was afternoon when he received a message:

the Lady Alazais commanded him to come to the garden.

It was not an unusual summons, but he was surprised when he saw Loba sitting with Alazais on a stone seat, underneath the spreading branches. He approached them a trifle doubtfully, Alazais looking at him intently. Loba was gazing out over the river, and he saw only the clear profile and the splendid braids shining against the background of dark green.

" Messire Raimbaut," said Alazais, in a tone which revealed her deep feeling, " the Countess has asked you to follow her to-morrow to Cabaret. I have myself invited you to come to Beziers. You have replied to neither of us. Whither do you choose to go? "

In the silence that followed, the conflict between Raimbaut's reason and his passion raged fiercely. He had thought in the morning that he should decide to go to Beziers. But as he looked on Loba, he could not give her up. At last he replied, —

" Truly, my lady, I have not yet made up my mind."

At this Loba turned to him with a smile of amusement.

" If the scale hang so level, why not throw dice for us? "

" Ah, no! " interposed Alazais, " I care not to be left to such a gross hazard."

Still Raimbaut hesitated until Loba, who seemed to sympathize with his difficulty, said, —

"Let him tell us after supper. Messire Raimbaut is compassionate, and does not wish to break either of our hearts. Let him come to the one he chooses, and the other will understand when she sees him not. What say you, Alazais; shall we leave it thus?"

"I care not," replied Alazais, a little wearily.

Raimbaut was relieved to take his departure, and pleased when he received instructions from Count Raimon to bear a message to a baron several leagues away. He galloped madly along the dusty road, but returned slowly, and in the calm of the night pondered the problem until he solved it.

Supper being over, the palace was dark and still. A varlet took the tired horse, and Raimbaut walked across the court to the low arch which led to the room of Alazais. He was master of himself, his mind at rest. He mounted the stair with a firm step, until, looking up, he saw Loba.

She stood at the top, the light of a torch shining full on her red hair and eager face. She had thrown a heavy crimson cloak over her shoulders, but it was open at the throat, and her bare arms were outspread, the tips of her fingers touching the cold walls on either side. Her eyes were half-shut, but as Raimbaut climbed the steps she closed them wholly, and the color left her cheek. He stopped just below her, for she barred his way. Smiling grimly, he placed his hand upon her wrist and gently pressed it from the wall.

Up to this moment his purpose to go to Alazais

had not weakened. Yet when his brown hand closed over the soft flesh, his will became like water. He paused irresolutely; he looked up appealingly. Loba gave a great sob, flung her white arms around his head, and crushed it to her breast.

"O Raimbaut, come with me!" was all she said.

He answered, —

"I will go with you."

CHAPTER XX

TOO GREAT A DEBTOR

THE early sunbeams had transformed the dull bricks of Toulouse to a rosy red, when Alazais entered the gate of the palace, followed by a man-at-arms and a little page carrying her book. She walked across the wide courtyard, stopping a moment to caress an old hound on the sill, as if there were no such thing as disappointment in the world. Yet her thoughts were bitter and her heart was sore. She had waited in her room until long after midnight in the expectation that Raimbaut would come. She had vainly hoped that he would go to Mass with her, but she had knelt alone on the cold gray stones of Saint Sernin and the chill had reached her heart. She climbed the stairs to her father's room, and found him sitting in his tall chair. Before him stood Raimbaut, his hands clenched behind his back.

"I am sorry to tell you, my daughter," Count Raimon began, "that Messire Raimbaut has decided to leave us."

"We shall deeply regret his departure," said Alazais. Then with an air of polite interest, she asked, "Can you tell us when and where you plan to go?"

"This morning — to Cabaret, so please you, Lady Alazais."

"I also regret to say," continued Raimon, "that

Messire Raimbaut and I have a disagreement, which I am sure he will allow you to settle. I wish to bestow upon him a sum of money, in order that he may make his departure from Toulouse equipped as a young man should be who has served four years as my squire. He insists that he is already too great a debtor. You shall judge between us."

There was a bitter smile in the corners of Alazais' mouth.

"It is, I believe, without precedent for a troubadour to decline a gift. If Messire Raimbaut hopes to be successful in his vocation, he must accept whatever is offered him, and learn to beg gracefully for more. Concerning the question you have put to me, my dear father, I am sorry to decide against you. Messire Raimbaut is right. He is already too great a debtor. He deserves no further benefits."

Count Raimon, who had looked to Alazais for assistance in persuading Raimbaut, was astonished at her answer.

"Not so," he declared; "I must challenge the verdict. To Messire Raimbaut I am under obligation for many happy hours. He has sung to me songs whose value cannot be measured. When the honor of Toulouse was assailed, he risked his life to defend it. I cannot repay him by an insignificant gift, though I offer it with my best wishes for success, wherever his way may lead."

Alazais was about to speak when Raimbaut, with a bow full of reverence, said, —

"You have both been better to me than I deserve. My heart is sore that I must seem ungrateful. The gift I cannot accept. Farewell! May the angels of God guide and keep you both!"

With these words Raimbaut took his departure, not daring to look up. He had realized from the beginning that he could say or do nothing which would put him in anything but an unfavorable light. He knew that he must appear infatuated and disloyal.

There yet remained the parting with his friends in the tower. He found Bernart seated at the window, where he loved to feed the doves and feel the cool breeze from the river. Scarce replying to the cordial greeting, Raimbaut plunged abruptly into his story. He had barely finished, when the old troubadour clasped his hand, and said, —

"I think you are taking a wise step, my boy. You have my hearty good wishes. A young man must follow his heart wherever it may lead him. You could not continue for ever here at Toulouse, clinging like a cat to the fireside, nor could you follow the Lady Alazais to Beziers as if you were one of her wedding gifts. You have the whole wide world before you. You cannot be a real troubadour until you have travelled far afield. The wander-lust comes again to me as I think of the winding road, the hedgerows, the cool stream singing through its pebbles, the blue sky over all. I can feel the fresh breeze in my face and the warm sun on my back. Think of

the noble castles which will open wide their doors, of the many gracious chatelaines and fair demoiselles who will smile on you. Alack! I wish that I were young again!"

"Indeed," exclaimed Raimbaut, "your heart is always young. You understand me as none other."

"I' faith," replied Bernart, "these stiff joints will not let me deceive myself. Did I not love you with all my heart, I should envy you as the rival who is bound to take the place which I once filled. You will be the best troubadour in all Languedoc. If you are true to your art, everything is possible to you. You have already found many a good song, and four years of careful training have made your voice almost perfect. Do not forget to have plenty of strings for your lute: the weather makes sad havoc with them. Above all, be careful of your throat. It is not possible to buy new strings for this, the finest of all instruments. And now I know you must away; so take with you an old man's blessing."

This hearty God-speed, where he had expected reproaches, was almost too much for Raimbaut. He had nerved himself to go through the day's ordeal, but was not prepared for sympathy. He fell on his knees as Bernart made the sign of the cross over him, but did not trust himself to speak. He found Jacques waiting for him on the stairs.

"Everything is ready, my master. How soon do we start?"

"Within the hour."

"May I have a few minutes on an errand of my own?"

"You may have the whole hour, if you wish. It should take all of sixty minutes to say good-bye to so pretty a little laundress as Marie. Are you sure you had better come with me? Why not stay here at Toulouse with her and the other friends you have made?"

Jacques flushed hotly.

"Indeed, my master, I started with you from Vacqueiras, and will follow until you tell me plainly that you are weary of me." Then looking up deprecatingly, he inquired, "You have no doubt that it is best for you to go?"

"None!"

Jacques hastened quickly away, and as Raimbaut climbed the stairs he met Miraval, Folquet and Guilhem hurrying down to their breakfast.

"Is it true," asked Guilhem eagerly, "that you are going with the Countess of Cabaret?"

"I am going," was the reply.

"You are a lucky dog," exclaimed Miraval.

"That he is!" cried Folquet, looking at him enviously.

It was evident that they considered Raimbaut the favorite of Fortune. They congratulated him heartily and bade him an affectionate farewell. When he came to his room he found Bonifaz walking the floor, evidently much perturbed. He stopped at Raimbaut's entrance, —

"Have you quite decided to go to Cabaret?"

"I have," answered Raimbaut.

"Are you willing to tell me your reason?" inquired Bonifaz earnestly.

"I am not willing."

Bonifaz, controlling himself with difficulty, said very gently and persuasively, —

"It is four years since we made our first vow of comradeship. I claim the right as your dearest friend to speak plainly to you to-day. I am sure you are making a mistake to leave Toulouse. It will be wiser for you to wait until June and to go to Beziers. Should you not care to follow Alazais, you must come to me. I shall soon return to Monferrat; you have promised to make me a visit there. Reconsider your determination."

"It is unnecessary."

"Then," continued Bonifaz, "I must speak more plainly. If you leave Toulouse and go neither to Beziers nor Monferrat, I think you doubly wrong in choosing Cabaret. From the beginning I have seen your growing passion for the Countess Loba. I have always treated her with respect, and naught would I say against her now. You have told me many times of your dream of a Perfect Love. Do you think that the Countess Loba is your ideal? Have you given her your promise?"

"I have sworn to go with her," replied Raimbaut, speaking with no hint of feeling in his voice.

Bonifaz's patience, already sorely tried, gave way.

"You had better break such a promise than to keep it. I tell you there are many women wearing shoulder-knots in the streets of Toulouse who are better than she!"

At these words the blood rushed into Raimbaut's face, and he struck Bonifaz fiercely on the mouth with his clenched fist. He staggered to the floor. When he rose, his dagger was flashing in his hand. Raimbaut had already drawn his own weapon. The comrades faced each other with murder in their hearts. Bonifaz was first to come to himself. He tossed his dagger through the window, sending it clattering to the courtyard below. Then he turned to Raimbaut with a smile that had neither love nor merriment in it.

"I will balance my oath of comradeship against the indignity of this blow, and call them both cancelled. The insult and the friendship are alike forgotten."

With these words he left Raimbaut, whose soul was torn by a storm of emotions. Indeed, he did not move until Jacques came running in to tell him that every one was mounted and the cavalcade waited only for him.

Of the farewells in the courtyard Raimbaut was almost unconscious. As he rode out of the gate on his tall roan destrier, even Alazais, in the bitterness of her disappointment, could not but wish him well, as she watched from her window. In all the palace there was no one who did not mourn the departure of the young sire of Vacqueiras, — he who had tried

so hard to keep his vow and lead a life of loving-kindness toward all the world.

For many minutes Loba kept by the side of Raimbaut, and, like a wise woman, spoke not a word. She knew he had gone through a trying ordeal and that his soul was still in a tumult. At the first dip in the road she bade Jourdain and the men-at-arms ride ahead, so that she was left alone with Raimbaut. It was only when the drawn lines about his mouth began to relax a little that she put her hand on his as it rested on the pommel of the saddle. Even then she did not speak, but looked up at him with an expression of complete sympathy. Gradually the color returned to his cheeks and the light into his eyes.

"Are you sorry that you came with me?" she asked. "Do you wish you were back in Toulouse?"

For reply Raimbaut suddenly lifted her out of the saddle, and crushed her in his arms.

"Beware!" she said laughingly. "If Jourdain should see you, your life would not be worth a denier's purchase. You know how fierce he is and how jealous of me."

At this Raimbaut kissed her, unresisting, then put her back on her palfrey, and when they joined their companions they were cantering sedately, a spear-length apart.

All the morning they rode along a level road with low hills on either side. Far in the south rose the ragged line of the Pyrenees, their snowy summits

distinguishable from the white clouds only by their changelessness.

They stopped with the Baron of Saint Papoul for dinner, and it was late in the afternoon when they entered the deep gorge that led to Cabaret. On both sides the rocks rose high above them, seamed, furrowed, and stained with strange and fantastic colors. Here and there could be seen the little tunnels from which the miners emerged like rats from their holes, for the mountains were full of iron, and brought large revenues to their owners.

The mists were already gathering and the shadows deepening. The road followed a winding river which flung its spray up to their very stirrups. Raimbaut knew they were nearing their journey's end by the way the horses tossed their heads and quickened their speed. But he could see nothing save the jutting shoulders of the precipice, until the towers of Cabaret suddenly loomed before him. It seemed a veritable dream-castle silhouetted against the sky, for it was perched so high that the sunbeams still shone brightly on its walls. Built along the narrow crest of a detached rock, it followed the irregular outlines like a serpent basking in the sun, uprearing one tall tower which seemed to watch the approach through the narrow gorge.

They reached the ragged village of Lastours, galloped through the narrow streets, and swinging sharply to the left, began to climb a steep road, barely wide enough for two to ride abreast. Part of the

track was cut in the cliff and part built up laboriously with fragments of the discolored rock. As they ascended, they gradually emerged from the shadows and halted before a narrow portal. At the command of Jourdain the gate swung sullenly open. The little cavalcade clattered through a vaulted passage and entered the courtyard, still bright with the red light from the western sky.

" That," whispered Loba, pointing to the tall tower which faced the west, " is the cage where I shall keep you prisoner for ever."

Raimbaut answered, —

" You may leave the door open, for I shall never try to escape."

CHAPTER XXI

THE APPLES OF LOVE

For six centuries the Counts of Cabaret had ruled the country from their strong castle on the crags above Lastours. As if possessed of the philosopher's stone, they had turned the iron from the mountains into red gold. Seldom wandering far from home, they were content to live in peace, unless their lands were threatened.

The succession had come at last to twin brothers, Peire and Jourdain: the former strong and determined, the latter weak and vacillating. Peire married Brunessen, the daughter of a neighboring baron, a lady of severe and homely virtues; and scarce six months later, Jourdain chose the beautiful Loba. Brunessen, presuming on her age and experience, attempted to inculcate thrifty habits and sedate manners in her younger and more attractive sister; but there was rebellion at the first word of authority. No bond of sympathy existed between them, and matters went from bad to worse, until, at Loba's insistence, the command of the castle was divided, separate establishments being set up at the extreme ends of the fortress.

Here Loba was fortunate, for, when lots were drawn, to Jourdain went the buildings facing south and west, while Peire was forced to take the tower

looking north. The two dwelling-places symbolized the character of their occupants, that of Loba being bright and sunny, with a view of the green meadows near Carcassonne, while Brunessen's quarters looked down into a black valley bounded by unscalable cliffs. The breach between the sisters became complete; but the brothers were not unfriendly, in spite of the quarrel between their wives.

The virtuous Brunessen was shocked when her sister chose the whole of the great South Tower for her apartments, and relegated Jourdain to a remote turret. She persuaded Peire to remonstrate with his brother on the ground of military policy, protesting against the giving of a strong keep into a woman's hand. But Loba did not hesitate to reply that she was precious enough to be housed in the castle's most impregnable tower, and that Jourdain's obvious duty was to guard the entrance gate.

Dame Brunessen, already offended, was doubly scandalized at the arrival of Raimbaut. He was given a room on the lower floor of Loba's tower, from which the captain of the guard was ousted, the latter being forced to occupy a small cupboard opening from the room used by the men-at-arms. Strange to say, Brunessen took no aversion to Raimbaut, who, she declared, had only been " led astray by that wicked, designing woman."

Jourdain denied nothing to his beautiful countess; and as Loba's tastes were luxurious to the last degree,

the four corners of the earth had been searched to embellish her apartments. The second floor, which became her audience-room, was decorated in the oriental style with heavy rugs and rich tapestries from the East. The air was fragrant with the odor of sandal-wood and the perfume of spices. The upper floor was her chamber, and the open parapet above she converted into a garden, with plants blooming in the shelter of its walls, and an awning protecting part of it from the sun.

The first month that Raimbaut spent at Cabaret passed like a dream, rose-colored, balmy, exquisite. He thought not of the past, and planned not for the future. The present was enough. Visitors were few; there was scarce a book in the castle; little attention was paid to song or singers. Yet for many weeks he discovered no lack, for Cabaret with Loba was Paradise.

The summer was well nigh over, when a hot afternoon found them together on the tower. His costume was a cool gray, of rich material, for Loba had treated him with limitless generosity and loaded him with gifts. Accustomed to have each whim gratified, it seemed a matter of course for her to satisfy Raimbaut's every wish.

She was reclining in the shade of the awning, on a low couch covered with soft brown linen, bordered with a pattern of rich arabesque. She wore no mantle, and her short-sleeved tunic was of her favorite yellow samite and open at the throat. She was

swinging her foot impatiently and eyeing Raimbaut a little resentfully, as he stood in the warm sunlight, bending over his lute.

"Well, Messire," said she at last, "how long do you mean to pick at those dreadful strings? Will you never tire? I sometimes wonder if that old lute be not first in your affections?"

"I was but making the music for a little song I have written in your praise."

"A song to my praise, say you! I would rather have you kiss me than sing to me. I cannot understand how a woman can be pleased to have her lover for ever saying silly things, when he might have his arm about her!"

At this he laid his lute down, but Loba lifted a forbidding finger.

"Not now, Messire Raimbaut. I like not cold kisses, nor caresses furnished on demand."

"As you will," he replied, and took up his task again. But he found that the melody had left him for ever. He laid the instrument aside and stood looking out into the distance. All around him rose the steep cliffs, dark and sinster against the sky. They were penetrated by narrow gorges, each with its foaming brook. No tree found root, and only a few starved shrubs were scattered along the rocks. For a long time his eyes followed the ragged crests which barred his sight. Only in the south could he look out to the open country. Here stretched the bright green meadows and here his glance rested. Mean-

while Loba watched him keenly, and suddenly commanded, —

"Tell me your thoughts quickly, before you have time to polish them. Tell me at once, what was in your mind?"

"I will conceal nothing," replied Raimbaut, turning to her with a smile. "I was wondering if the brooks were conscious of the struggle as they forced their way through the gorges, and questioning if they found contentment when they reached the level plain. It was but a common thought."

"Are you sure that you did not wish you were the mountain-brook, thus to escape to the outside world?"

"I had no such fancy," replied Raimbaut, as he threw himself on the rug by her couch and pressed her hand to his lips.

"I' faith," declared Loba discontentedly, "if I were a man, I would never kiss a lady's hand. If she gave me not her lips, I would none of her."

At these words, so full of provocation, Raimbaut lifted himself on his knees, but she repulsed him.

"Again I tell you, I care not for the kiss that I must ask for! Come, let us look at the apples. They are almost ripe for picking."

She gave Raimbaut her hand and lifted him to his feet, laughing merrily, for her impatience had quite disappeared; and together they went to a little tree growing in the rich earth close to the parapet. It reached no higher than Loba's shoulders, its branches

covered with green leaves, and with two round apples presenting their red cheeks to the sun. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was not fairer when it tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden.

"I do not think they will grow any larger," declared Loba critically.

"Perhaps not; but the blushes spread and deepen. Have you ever heard of the Apples of Persepolis?"

"No; tell me of them."

"The story says that there grew inside the walls of the ancient city a tree, every apple of which was on one side bitter, on one side sweet. It was a type of life itself. What think you of it?"

"That nothing were easier than to eat the good half and throw the bad away. Is not that the secret of happiness?"

"I am not sure that I should be contented," replied Raimbaut doubtfully. "I would know the whole of life, tasting the bitter as well as the sweet."

Loba shook her head.

"I like not the idea of your Apples of Persepolis. We have always called these the Apples of Love, and we will eat them together when they are fully ripe, as a proof that our hearts will never change."

She said this, her eyes aglow, her lips parted with passion, and Raimbaut took her in his arms and kissed her thirstily, again and again. They had quite forgotten the world around them, when they were startled by the faint tinkle of a bell, hidden among the vines which covered the parapet. At the

sound Loba drew herself away with an exclamation of disappointment and vanished through the doorway. Raimbaut seized his lute, and seating himself in an embrasure of the wall, began to sing with a soft voice a song of Arnaut's which he loved. There were footsteps on the stairs, which grew louder until Jourdain appeared, ushering a tall cavalier who advanced with a smile on his dark face. It was none other than Berguedan, and at sight of him Raimbaut's hand wandered involuntarily to his dagger.

The Spaniard showed plainly the effect of the fierce struggle in the lists, which had so nearly ended his life. He was pale and thin, but in his eyes glowed the same evil fire, and he spoke as carelessly as if he had no memory of defeat.

"My dear Raimbaut, I am charmed to see you again, looking so debonair. I little thought, when I accepted the invitation of the good Countess Brunessen, to find you here. It is easy to see you are the special favorite of Fortune. You convince me that Heaven always leads the footsteps of the virtuous into green pastures."

"Fortune has blessed me beyond my deserts," replied Raimbaut curtly. "Yet I doubt that the saints have me in their special care."

"I see you no longer wear a severed mantle," continued Berguedan; "but who would not change Saint Martin for Saint Loba? Here she comes to bless us with her presence."

"Saint, say you?" exclaimed Loba, as she ap-

peared at the door. " I have never been called a saint before, though many a pretty name has been given me from time to time. I wonder what day in the calendar can be assigned to me? "

" That I cannot tell," said Berguedan. " Perhaps the first of May; certainly a day in spring-time. Whatever the date, I know that I shall always worship at your shrine."

All the time the Catalonian talked, he had been looking about with a roving eye.

" What a charming place you have made of this old tower! " he exclaimed, touching the blossoms with a caressing hand. When his bright eye discovered the bell hidden in the vine, he laughed and stopped before the little tree, admiring the beautiful fruit it bore.

" I am sure," said he, turning to Loba, " that our fair Countess has been growing one of these apples in anticipation of my arrival, and will eat it with me?"

Loba answered, —

" There can be no misunderstanding about these apples: they are already promised to Messire Raimbaut."

As she spoke there was a challenge in her voice and in her eyes.

" Well, well! " said Berguedan to Jourdain, " I see I am forestalled in my devotions. Yet I cannot change to any other saint."

Jourdain laughed admiringly. It was evident that the Spaniard stood high in the Count's good

graces, for they took their departure together, arm in arm.

Then Loba turned to Raimbaut with a face in which sorrow and distrust were plainly visible.

"Why comes this man here?" she exclaimed. "He is like the serpent in Eden. He has come to drive the happiness out of the little garden we have made. Why did you not kill him when he was in your power? I am sure his presence is a menace to our love."

"I cannot see how he can harm us," replied Raimbaut, wondering at her fear. "While I have my good sword, we cannot be in danger."

"Never again," declared Loba, "will he meet you in the open field. This is a tangled skein which no sharp blade can sever. I will to my husband; and give him a hint which will hasten Berguedan's departure."

CHAPTER XXII

UNDER DEATH'S SPREAD HAND

In Provence the summer does not merge into autumn, but dies a sudden death. Without warning, the sun ceases to shine and the sky to smile. The very night of Berguedan's arrival the clouds began to gather; the next day they were lowering. When Loba awoke on the following morning, the tops of the high hills were hidden by mists, and the prophecy of rain was in the air. Nevertheless, immediately after breakfast she mounted her horse and rode out of the courtyard, attended by Raimbaut. They zigzagged down the steep hill and trotted through the little village of Lastours. Not a word was spoken until they reached a narrow path leading through a deep gorge, which was the only egress to the north. On both sides the trees grew thickly, their roots fed by the waters of a sparkling brook.

"God knows how I prayed to see you last night!" said the Countess almost fiercely to her companion. "Why did you not come?"

"I came not," replied Raimbaut, "because I was in doubt concerning my welcome. Last evening you were so gracious to Messire Berguedan that I thought you preferred to talk with your old friend alone."

"Old friend or new friend, you know right well he cannot take your place. I lay sleepless till the dawn

broke. I beg you choose some other time for causeless jealousy. Unless we rid ourselves of this smiling hell-hound we are both of us undone. He lingered on the tower till midnight, his black eyes peering everywhere, his nostrils like a dog's scenting prey. I spoke him fairly for both our sakes; but when he left me I told Jourdain plainly I would have no more of Berguedan. 'Make what excuse you will,' I said, 'but send him away!' Can you believe that this same easy mate of mine, who for eight years has obeyed my least word, this effigy of a man, at first with arguments of courtesy, and last by an unvarying, 'No, I will not,' refused to drive this friend of the devil from Cabaret? What think you has the Spaniard done with Jourdain to change him to such a stubborn mood? I tell you I like it not, — I like it not."

Raimbaut listened with wonder, and saw with amazement the face of his mistress, so gay and careless, grow gray and haggard as she spoke. He had never seen her show the least sign of fear, and her courage had seemed without a flaw.

"What can he do to us," he asked, "more than for one night to make me jealous and you sorrowful? I swear he shall not bring this trouble on us again. He is but a man, and it will go hard if I cannot match wit and strength with him."

"Strength, mayhap; but wit, no!" exclaimed Loba. "Little do you understand this slimy Catalonian. He will not cross swords with you, but like

a serpent will sting the heel of his enemy. He has one drug to kill on the instant, another in a week, and a third in a month. Have you forgotten the death of the Count of Courthézon? It was under my very eyes, and the horror of it has never left me. There is no doubt but day after day this devil incarnate gave his trusting friend deadly poison, instead of medicines to cure his malady. Heard you not how he murdered the Spanish nobleman whose wife he coveted? It was with a ring, through which, when hands are clasped, a point protrudes, giving a death wound under cover of the grasp of friendliness. Something tells me he has come here to kill you. Oh, Raimbaut! you must leave me. Ride not back to-day. Jacques will follow you to Carcassonne. I have here in my purse both gold and jewels. My heart is like to break at parting, but you must go!"

She broke into a passion of tears, sobbing pitifully, and for a long time would not be comforted, though he held her in his arms. Never before had he seen her weep, and her fear and loathing were so great that he could not restrain the chill that crept over him. What possible reason could Berguedan have to injure him? His memory went back to the day when he first saw the Spaniard at Courthézon. He remembered the look of inquiry that passed between him and the Countess des Baux; he recalled his curiosity over the sword, and the Book of Hours. What part had this man in his life? Was there any

doubt that he had been guilty of the traitorous attack upon Peirol?

"No!" said Raimbaut, "I cannot fly from Cabaret in such a cowardly way. I have a mind to draw sword and kill him in the open courtyard, without warning. He is a deadly snake. I like not the way he looks at you; I have no mind to leave my Lady of Delight to fall a prey to Spanish guile."

At this Loba raised her head, —

"I swear to you that, while I have a dagger for him and for myself, Berguedan shall never possess me. After all, I think you are right to stay in Cabaret. Why should we fear him? Indeed, why should we think of him at all? Let us talk about the weather."

Laughing half-heartedly, she held out her hand, on which a raindrop glistened. She looked up at the heavy clouds and cried, —

"We shall be drenched to our skins. I am like a cat: next to death itself I hate a wetting. I will race you back to Cabaret."

She swung her horse around on his haunches, and flew at a mad gallop down the narrow path through the woods. Raimbaut started quickly after, but could scarce gain at all on her, as the short turns delayed the tall destrier on which he rode. They were nearing the village when Loba gave a sudden cry of warning, and Raimbaut crouched in the saddle as an arrow flew a hand-breadth above his head and buried itself in a tree by the roadside. He did not

draw rein until he reached her side at the entrance of the village, and to his surprise found her quite unafraid, and elated at the adventure.

"Pish!" said she, "I am not afraid of arrows! They never go where they are meant. I saw a man rise from the thicket not twenty yards from the road-side, with his shaft drawn to the head. When I cried out, it startled him and spoiled his aim. Do you think it was Berguedan?"

"Frankly, I do not," replied Raimbaut, laughing. "It was probably some old lover of yours who wished to put me out of the way."

The first person they saw on their arrival at the castle was the Spaniard, talking calmly with Jourdain as they examined the work of some masons on the wall. He smiled down on them, blew a kiss from his fingers, and complimented Loba on the color the rain had brought to her cheeks.

It was on the third day after the arrow-shot that Raimbaut was walking in the courtyard. To and fro he paced in the gathering gloom, for the days were perceptibly shortening. Although he had recovered from his uneasiness concerning Berguedan, there was a growing feeling of discontent in his heart, which he refused to recognize. As the high rocks shut in Cabaret on all sides, so was his imagination confined: he found no new songs, nor fresh thoughts.

Back and forth he walked, his eyes on the ground, his mind far away, when it occurred to him that he had promised to look at a brace of hounds which

Jacques was training, and turning quickly on his heel, he started for the tower. He had taken but a single step when there was a crash on the pavement behind him, and he was thrown on his face. He rose quite unhurt, though covered with fragments of stone, and discovered a huge rock lying shattered on the very spot where he would have stepped, had he not turned suddenly at the thought of the hounds.

It was plainly a missile from the parapet which towered above him. Was it pushed over by a designing hand? He ran hurriedly up the staircase, but found nothing except the tools of the workmen where they had been left.

This second adventure, coming so soon after the first, left Raimbaut little doubt that his life was every moment in danger. He took the most extreme precautions against attack, keeping Jacques with him as much as possible; and when not followed by his faithful friend, walked with alert eyes, his hand on his dagger. He slept at night with Jacques lying across the threshold, and, as a further safeguard, leaned a lance against his door, so that the least movement would dislodge it. Early one morning, just before dawn, he was awakened by the clatter of the lance on the floor. Jacques was ruefully rubbing his head, upon which it had fallen. Raimbaut sprang out of bed, grasped his sword, and rushed out into the corridor. Though he searched everywhere, he could find no one. The intruder had doubtless taken to flight at the sound of the falling lance.

It was not a danger like this, however, that Raimbaut feared most, but he was haunted day and night by a dread that his life might be taken without warning, and without opportunity of resistance. He looked upon every dish and every flagon with suspicion, and hesitated to drink a cup of fair water from the spring. The hand of Death seemed to be spread over him. It took all his strength of will to stand the strain of the perpetual foreboding.

Nearly every day he rode out with Loba, falcon on wrist; for though they had little heart in the sport, it took them away from Cabaret, and minimized the danger. Raimbaut did not realize how great had been the shadow over him until, returning one night, he learned that Berguedan had been summoned to Barcelona by the command of his King. Jourdain, who was greatly dejected thereby, said that Berguedan's return was uncertain. He had gone away wishing them "health and happiness." For Loba he had left, as a remembrance of his pleasant stay at Cabaret, a parrot with a most wonderful gift of speech.

"Truly," declared she, "I shall never cease to love and cherish this same bird, if he speak not with his master's oily voice. He will always remind me of his owner's departure, for which, although I am not pious, I do devoutly thank God."

The autumn rains had now set in, but the next morning dawned clear and bright as if in sympathy with Loba and Raimbaut. They found themselves

laughing together on the tower, as they had not done for a full month. Suddenly Loba sprang to her feet.

"Let us eat one of the Apples of Love to-day! It shall be a feast of happiness."

She ran down to her room and came hurrying back with a large silver plate and a knife.

"I suppose," said she, very seriously, "there is some proper rite or ceremony with which this apple should be plucked and eaten. I do not know what it is, however; so I suggest that you pick the apple, that I cut it fairly in the middle, and that we each eat half. After that, you shall make me all the solemn vows and sweet promises that you can find in your heart, or take upon your lips. When you have done, I will try my best to equal you."

Raimbaut plucked one of the apples, leaving the other looking strangely forlorn on the little tree. He held it above his head where the sun could shine brightly on it, and slowly twisted it by the stem so that Loba might see its beautiful coloring.

"Do you notice," said he, "that it is nearly all red, which means that our life and our love will be happy? There is only one unsunned spot that still shows green, to betoken the little measure of bitterness which must come to every one."

Loba had never seemed so beautiful as on the instant when she lifted her hand for the Apple of Love. Raimbaut held it as high as he could, but she reached it easily with her long white arm. She placed the fruit gently on the plate, and

SHE REACHED IT EASILY

after eyeing it a moment, cut it with the shining knife.

" Perfect! " declared Raimbaut. " I am sure I cannot tell which is the larger piece. Our shares will be exactly alike."

He was about to bite the apple, when Loba, who was examining hers doubtfully, seized his hand.

" Ah, wait a moment," she cried. " Do you notice the discoloration about the core? "

" It is nothing," replied Raimbaut, catching her arm, and trying to take the piece of apple from her. " We have let it hang too long upon the tree."

" Do you mean by that, Messire Raimbaut, that you think our love is over-ripe? " she demanded with a smile, but still examining what she held with a critical eye. " I think, before we eat this, we had better try our friend the parrot with a few of the seeds; meanwhile, touch not your lips to it."

She carefully cut out the middle of both pieces, and placed the fragments with the seeds in the little dish which hung on the parrot's cage. The latter, who had been moping all the morning, and who, as he spoke but in Spanish, did not make himself intelligible, quickly ate the core of the apple. Loba and Raimbaut stood for several minutes watching by the cage. At last Raimbaut became impatient and said, —

" You see the bird is very happy with his share. I intend to have mine."

He had hardly spoken, however, when the parrot

began to move uneasily on his perch. He fluffed his feathers until he looked twice his natural size. For a while he remained perfectly quiet, and then suddenly flapped his wings wildly and uttered the most astonishing medley of shrieks and unintelligible words. For a few seconds the bird dashed himself about the cage, until fluttering feebly, he fell on his side and was still.

The two realized that they had escaped death by almost a miracle. Berguedan had forced into the apple one of the deadly poisons with which he was so skilful. He had been willing, in his desire to make way with Raimbaut, to sacrifice Loba as well.

Even Jourdain was convinced of Berguedan's guilt, and it was evident that they had nothing more to fear from the Spaniard at Cabaret. So Raimbaut and Loba settled down to their old life very much as before.

The rains now continued without intermission, and as day after day passed, Raimbaut became strangely uneasy. He searched the whole fortress, but could not discover a single manuscript to read. His efforts to compose new songs were unsuccessful, his mood being without the least inspiration. Occasionally the question would come to him whether he had attained the object of his life. But he made no effort to reply to his conscience. He did not dare remember his vow, for he had not worn a severed mantle since he came to Cabaret, nor looked into the Book of Hours since the night he gave his pledge

to Loba at Toulouse. She, as Raimbaut became moodier, grew each day more gentle. She frequently asked him to sing to her, choosing a chanson beginning, —

"Oh, love is the wine of life;
Let us drink of it, you and I."

Only with reluctance she allowed him to leave her side. He discovered that she was studying him. Again and again he asked her to tell him what was on her mind. Sometimes she gave an answer which was plausible enough, and sometimes she laughingly refused to tell him anything.

All the while the rain pattered outside, Raimbaut was conscious that something was passing in Loba's thoughts which should be revealed only at a time of her own choosing.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LADY HARD OF HEART

For nearly a week Jourdain had planned to go to Carcassonne. He had a long list of articles for which Loba had expressed a desire, and his chief happiness being to gratify her, he had looked despairingly at the driving rain. When at last a day dawned clear, and the sun showed his smiling face over the high wall which encircled Cabaret, he took his departure.

Raimbaut had started forth even before Jourdain. With Peire as a companion, he had gone in quest of a huge boar, lately seen roaming through one of the rough mountain gorges. It was the first time he had deserted Loba, yet he enjoyed every minute of his absence. The baying of the hounds was music to his ear, and the pursuit through wood and thicket a joy supreme. In the pleasure of the hunt he forgot the questioning, ever more importunate, of his soul.

They came upon the enormous beast late in the afternoon. He stood at bay against a gnarled tree and was defending himself stoutly, having already disembowelled two of the boar-hounds with his long tusks. To Raimbaut came the honor of the final blow; and in the struggle he ceased to be conscious of the battle that was beginning in his own breast.

The shadows were gathering as he climbed the

steep hill to Cabaret. He was thinking very tenderly and with some self-reproach, of Loba. How beautiful she was, how kind she had been to him! Hers might not be the Perfect Love of which he had dreamed, but it was very true and very sweet. He rushed to his room and threw off his garments, soiled and torn by the rocks.

When he reached the great hall, what was his surprise to find with Loba none other than the Countess Ermengarda. She was pacing the room with long strides like a man-at-arms, and she met him with a smile in the corners of her stern mouth.

"Well, Messire Raimbaut," she began with an assumption of extreme resentment, "I admire your effrontery. I was beginning to outgrow the dislike I took to you when we first met at Beaucaire, and here, on the night of my arrival, you keep me waiting for my supper!"

"Alas!" exclaimed Raimbaut, "it is my ill-fortune to offend where I am most desirous of pleasing!"

"I must admit that was a very pretty answer," replied Ermengarda, her face softening as she looked at him, "and I do not know where I have seen a more graceful and deferential bow. You have certainly learned something from the teaching of gentle Alazais. Tell me, why did you leave her?"

To this question, thrown at him with startling abruptness in the very presence of Loba, Raimbaut replied, —

"You know it is a poor bird that spends all his life

in the nest. I wished to stretch my wings. Furthermore, I had long cherished a desire to visit you."

Ermengarda smiled skeptically.

"So the desire to see me won you from Toulouse? Messire Raimbaut, you left Alazais three months ago. It is an easy two days' journey to Narbonne. You have been a long time on the road. Some vagrant fancy must have taken possession of you, unless you lost your way? It would be a sore injury to my pride to believe that I have been forestalled in your favor by some other lady. Even my long cherished love for Loba would turn to hate, were I convinced that she had detained you here at Cabaret."

"This is all very interesting," Loba broke in, leading the way to the table. "I feel quite a simpleton in the presence of two such wits. I hope that you will condescend to sheathe your swords and devote yourselves for a little time to the poor fare my table affords."

During dinner, Ermengarda talked almost incessantly, as was her wont; yet all the while she studied the two companions with her sharp eyes, and they were both aware of her scrutiny. When the meal was ended, she turned to Raimbaut.

"Do you know that the good people of Toulouse were beginning to think you had furnished food for the wolves on the mountain? You disappeared so thoroughly that no single word had they of you, when I left Count Raimon this morning."

" I' faith," replied Raimbaut, flushing, " I have reached an age when I am able to protect myself not alone against wolves, but against whatever else may come in my path."

" And yet," said Ermengarda, " you were not able to reach Narbonne in a long three months! I must take you with me at my departure, to assure your arrival. Either the fair Loba is beginning to weary of your presence, or you are already tiring of her smiles. It will be a mercy for me to separate you."

" No one could tire of the gracious Countess of Cabaret, in three months, or in three years," declared Raimbaut earnestly. " We have a compact that if either wearies of the other, it is to be confessed frankly. Both she and the Lady Alazais have been more gracious to me than I deserve."

" Good," exclaimed Ermengarda, with an approving nod. " There are some of our spoiled gallants, troubadours, and barons too, who think to gain a reputation by boasting how this or that great lady vainly desired their song and service. Tell me why, with all Languedoc from which to choose, where are a thousand chatelaines with pretty faces, you planned to come to me at Narbonne? "

There was something in the tone of the last question which demanded the truth. Raimbaut answered, —

" While I care not to go to you now, I hope some day to visit you. I wish to gain your favor because

of your known devotion to the Gay Science, and your kindness to the troubadours."

"A fair and courtly answer," exclaimed Ermengarda, "worthy of Bernart in his prime, or of the other Raimbaut, he of Courthézon, — God rest his soul! Do you know, when I was young, every woman in Languedoc, from fifteen to fifty, loved one of these two men? Yet Bernart now clings, like a well-fed dog, to a warm fireside at Toulouse, and the Count, having grown too gross to pass through the doors of Courthézon, died like a rat in his hole and rests under a lying slab of alabaster. You seem to be a strange mingling of these two men. You sing like Bernart; and you have a bend of the neck and a wave of the hand like the Count of Courthézon when he was a gay cavalier. Heigho! Between ourselves, I confess it was him I loved."

For a long time she studied the young man in the light of the torches. Loba turned toward him also, and in her eyes was an expression which he could not read. She had spoken scarce a word.

"Humph!" said Ermengarda at last. "I know that Peirol is your father, and the Count of Courthézon was your over-lord; yet I have never heard your mother's name."

"That I cannot tell you. She died, I think, at my birth."

"Well, whether of high or lowly birth, she must have been a beauty; for truly I think, as you stand in the light, you are the most perfect picture of a

young gallant in all the Midi! That is a heavy load to stagger under, and if you are not spoiled already, spoiling will come soon. I do not know which is the more unfortunate — the pretty man, or the plain woman. God help them both! All a man needs is strength and courage. A man without courage and a woman without beauty are alike unhappy. I would have every plain-faced girl put out of her misery at once by the executioner. Alack, it is a sore subject with me: let us change it for a better. Tell me, have you found any good songs since that limping rhyme you made for me at Toulouse, beginning with, 'A meadow lark, rough-handled in the snare?' "

"A few have come to me, some of which have won favor."

"Well, sing me your best first. It will save trouble, for if this please me not, I need hear no more."

"Songs are like dishes," said Raimbaut. "There are many tastes, and one can never tell what will please. I have nothing worthy to offer you, but will sing something I made not long ago which I call 'Time a-Flying.' "

Ermengarda took her seat by the window. Raimbaut tuned his lute, improvised for a few bars, and began his chanson.

"I measure time no more by days nor hours,
I watch no more the dial in the sun."

When he had finished, Ermengarda nodded her head approvingly.

"It is not a bad song, and you sing it so that it seems better than it really is. I have never listened to a voice of richer quality. You have no rival except Peire Vidal, who is chanting the praises of the Countess of Marseille. She is even now at Toulouse with the jolly Count, her husband. He is much more enthusiastic than she, and declares Vidal writes the best songs that have ever been penned, and that he can climb three notes higher than any troubadour in Provence. Still, I care not for such gymnastics. Give me a voice with more quality to it. Tell me, my good Raimbaut, what are you planning to sing at Le Puy?"

"My lady, I am not certain that I shall enter the contest for the Golden Sparrow-Hawk."

"Not contest at Le Puy!" exclaimed Ermengarda. "You cannot stay away. I must throw aside all diplomacy and tell you what has occurred at Toulouse. So mad over Vidal is Count Barral of Marseille, that he offered to wager half his fortune that the little man with a voice which he calls a 'tenori vapeur' would carry away the prize. Count Raimon accepted the challenge for a large sum, and I did not hesitate to risk a year's revenue. There is not the least doubt that Peire will win unless you appear; for there is none other in all Provence who can equal him. I have come to beg that you will leave Cabaret for a little while. Borneil has agreed to

receive you as his pupil at Montpellier. A winter spent in study with him would prepare you not alone for Le Puy, but for your life-work which must follow."

As she spoke, Raimbaut's eyes glistened, and he looked eagerly at Loba. One glance decided him.

"Indeed, you are all in league to flatter me. I cannot go to Borneil, neither shall I sing at Le Puy."

"Then leave us to ourselves!" exclaimed Ermengarda angrily. "I would talk with Loba here alone. Though I have no hope of teaching you wisdom, she may listen to what I have to say."

Ermengarda remained at Cabaret for a full week. After her very summary dismissal of Raimbaut on the night of her arrival, she was kindness itself. Her knowledge about all matters connected with his art was profound. They spent many hours together, and she gave the young troubadour much valuable advice. She made no direct attempt to induce him anew to leave Cabaret. Yet as the result of her influence, his ambition, almost dead, awoke to new life. Soon, in spite of all his determination, he could not put the thought of Le Puy out of his mind. He knew well enough that Ermengarda was hoping every day he would announce his intention of following her to Narbonne, and from thence to Borneil at Montpellier; but he remained loyal to Loba, and would not yield. At last, Ermengarda gave up in despair. Her parting words to Raimbaut were, —

"Should a single ray of wisdom penetrate your handsome head and lead you to decide to go to Montpellier, you must first visit me for a few days in Narbonne. In spite of your stubbornness, I cannot help liking you. Not alone for the sake of my wager shall I pray to see you at Le Puy."

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN LOVE GROWS COLD

When Ermengarda disappeared through the gateway Loba and Raimbaut climbed the stairway together to the top of the tower. They had hardly found a moment to be alone since the Countess arrived at Cabaret. Now Loba seemed her old self again, bubbling over with high spirits, always ready with a witty answer and an apt word. Raimbaut was happy as he had not been since their Garden of Eden was disturbed by the serpent, Berguedan.

It was mid-afternoon, and Raimbaut stood looking southward toward Carcassonne. For a long time he had not spoken; Loba watched him keenly, with half-closed eyes. Suddenly the light went out of her face and she grew pale to the very lips.

"Raimbaut," she said, speaking almost in a whisper, "I have decided to let you go to Montpellier. Kiss me, and say farewell."

Raimbaut was so lost in thought that at first he did not comprehend the meaning of the words. He turned and looked at her wonderingly. Realization came to him slowly, but not a sound could he utter.

Having pronounced the verdict, Loba drew a long breath of relief and spoke more easily.

"I am not sure that I can tell you why I send you

from me, yet I will try to speak of what is in my heart. From the moment that Ermengarda spoke to us, I knew that the time of parting was near at hand. When you refused her I grew more certain, for my love waxed stronger, and this was my undoing. Had I loved you less I should have kept you here with me at Cabaret, careless of your future. I confess it gratified my pride that she was forced to ride away without you. Had she never come to us to kindle your ambition by speaking of Le Puy, you would have stayed with me contentedly a while longer. Yet you were growing weary of Cabaret, for each day you looked longer at the green fields in the south, you spent a longer time in reverie. I do not interest you as once I did! You need not shake your head. I send you away now while you still love me a little, because I cannot bear to have you linger until the last spark of love is dead. When love grows cold, even the gods cannot rekindle it."

As she spoke she looked straight into Raimbaut's eyes, a smile on her pallid lips. There was mingled love, wonder, and entreaty in his glance. Suddenly his cheeks flamed, his eyes grew black with anger.

"Why do you tell me this? Why not say plainly that you care no longer for me?"

"Because," replied Loba, "I can tell you nothing but the truth. My faith has been in the little likings that come and go. I was always a wanton at heart, until I saw you in the courtyard at Toulouse, with the sunlight on your brow. Since then I have been

possessed by a true passion I could not resist. I was always selfish; yet I have come to love you more than myself, and it is of you I think when I bid you go. Why should I lie? I wish to God that there had never been put within my heart a worship like this I bear for you!"

At these words Raimbaut's anger died. There was sincerity in every accent. Yet he did not believe her verdict was irrevocable.

"When shall I go? To-morrow?"

"Within the hour," she replied. "Even now Jacques is gathering your belongings together, with a few gifts which I hope you will treasure in memory of the golden days which are past. Now, once more, kiss me, and say farewell."

For a moment their lips touched, but hers were cold as death. She put her hands upon his shoulders, and studied his face as if she were looking upon one who had fallen into the long sleep. Her eyes filled; one large tear rolled unheeded down her cheek.

At this Raimbaut's love came back like a torrent. He would have gathered her into his arms, had not some strange power restrained him.

"I will not leave you!" he cried despairingly, for something told him he could not hope to change her. "If I stay not as your lover and your troubadour, I will serve as a varlet in the stables, to groom the palfrey on which you ride. I will tend the dog that comes at your call."

He threw himself at her feet, gaining hope from the

sound of his own voice and the fervor of his declaration.

She placed her hand upon his bowed head.

"No word can influence me, though all the time you speak, my heart play the traitor and beg me to listen. This is our separation. Many will love you, but the ideal woman of whom you dream will be hard to find. Alas, she does not dwell at Cabaret! Though the purpose of your life would be thwarted should you linger here, I should keep you did I not believe you would break away from me at last, in utter weariness. Only a woman's world is circled within the boundaries of her heart. I pray you may win success and happiness, though I be not near to see it. I think I shall yet learn to pray, if I can find some good old priest to teach me. Now, farewell."

To the silent appeal of Raimbaut's eyes, more eloquent than words, she smiled a joyless smile, and shook her head again sadly.

"May God keep you! May you find the Perfect Love!"

He pressed his lips to the white hand which hung listless by her side, turned from her, and staggered down the stairs.

Left alone, Loba stood motionless until the last echoing footstep died away. Then she lifted the hand on which his lips had last rested, and kissed it passionately. She raised her long arms above her head with a gesture of entreaty, and looked up despairingly at the hopeless sky. With hungry eyes she

followed the wall of ragged rocks which shut her in. Suddenly she caught sight of the lonely apple on the tree; she plucked it eagerly and tore it open with strong fingers. She could see where the poison lurked about the core. She gave an inarticulate cry of joy. Then she buried her white teeth in the deadly fruit.

So overwhelmed was Raimbaut by his emotion, that when he found himself riding down the steep path, he seemed to wake out of a swoon. Jacques followed close behind him, leading a pack-horse. They passed through Lastours and came to the parting of the ways. The road to the left led to Carcassonne, the narrow path to the right through the forest and over the mountains to the north and east. Up to this moment Raimbaut had made no plan concerning his future. Hoping against hope, he turned and gave one last look at Loba's tower: it was lonely and deserted.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Jacques.

"Over the mountains to Narbonne," replied Raimbaut, for he longed for solitude, and the narrow road through the woods appealed to his sombre mood. They passed the spot where but for Loba the arrow would have ended his life, and he saw the ragged shaft still embedded in the trunk of the tree.

Once through the forest, the riders came into the open country, and climbed higher and higher among the steep rocks. When they reached the summit and paused to rest their horses, the black clouds were beginning to gather. There was not the least sign

of any habitation, although they could see a long distance ahead. They put spurs to their horses, and galloped rapidly along the rocky road, looking keenly about for a place of shelter. Nothing was in sight but the barren rocks. The shadows were deepening and the big raindrops beginning to fall, when Jacques spied a poor castle consisting of a square tower, built on the very edge of a precipice, with a few outlying buildings enclosed in a rough wall. It was a scant mile ahead, but a little distance from the roadway, and they galloped towards it at full speed. Jacques leaped quickly from his horse, handed his bridle to Raimbaut, and beat loudly on the door. Again and again he cried out, and at last there appeared at the lattice a red face surrounded by a black beard and a mop of tousled hair.

"What would you here?" demanded a sour voice.

"An entrance, in the name of Our Lady of Pity!" replied Jacques. "Go tell your master there are two strangers at the gate who crave shelter from the storm and a lodging for the night."

"My master!" said the man, grinning widely. "Troth, I have no master but the devil. Who are you that come pounding at my door, waking me from my nap?"

Jacques, smothering his resentment, doffed his cap politely, and explained that it was Messire Raimbaut of Vacqueiras whom he served, and who was on his way to Montpellier.

"And what business has he with me? Why should

I do aught for him?" enquired the red visage at the lattice, evidently amused at his visitor's dilemma.

"There is no business whatever between us," replied Raimbaut, speaking for the first time, and as good-humoredly as he could, with the wind coming in fierce gusts and the rain pelting against his back. "Yet I shall be pleased to sing for you by the fireside to-night, and I have a story or two worth the telling. Moreover, my man here can show you a twist and a tumble such as will astonish your eyes."

"You do not tempt me," said the man, laughing mockingly. "I have no ear for music, and care not for silly stories. The last time I took a joglar into the house, by some sleight of hand he carried away with him a silver mug worth more than his wretched neck!"

This was too much for Jacques, who exclaimed, —

"Would you treat every man as a thief because one villain has stolen from you? I would not drive a dog away on such a night! I pray you be no longer merry at our expense."

At this the grin disappeared and the man replied,—

"If I treat the matter no longer as a joke, I shall come outside and cudgel you soundly for your impudence! The country-side is covered with useless mountebanks. Get you gone, or it will be the worse for you."

It did not seem possible that any one could be so cruel as to turn two strangers adrift in such a night and such a storm; but the fellow made his intention

plain by closing the lattice, and leaving them to the inclement weather and the gathering night.

It had become so dark that there was nothing left for them but to seek the shelter of the rocks. To add to their discomfiture, at this moment the pack-horse broke loose. Jacques spurred after him, and Raimbaut found himself alone. The storm redoubled its fury; he could not see a dozen paces away. He waited patiently for Jacques' return, and when he came not back, Raimbaut cried his name lustily. He received no reply, and was about to follow in the direction whither Jacques had disappeared, when he saw a torch flaring from the castle, and the surly custodian came through the driving rain to his side.

" Look you, it was only my jest," he shouted at the top of his voice, in order to make himself heard. " I left the lattice to open the door, but you had gone away. Come into the castle, and I will give you dry clothing, a good bed, and a hot supper."

" Right glad am I to accept your invitation," replied Raimbaut; " but my man has vanished and I must wait for his return."

" He cannot have gone far: I will leave the torch flaring over the door to guide his footsteps."

This promise being made, Raimbaut followed the man a little doubtfully, and soon found himself before a hot fire, with a flagon of spiced wine in his hand. He quaffed it in a single draught, and a moment later sank into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BIRD CAGE

RAIMBAUT thought he was once again in the old mill. Jacques was moving busily to and fro with the farmer's corn, the water was rushing against the wheel, and the mill-stones were making an infernal clatter. For a long time it seemed painful, but not at all strange, that his head was being used for the lower stone, against which the kernels were being ground. But as he gradually regained consciousness, he realized that although his head was full of weird noises, it was not a part of the mill.

Greatly relieved at this conclusion, he raised himself on his elbow, but fell back deadly sick and faint on a pile of straw, and was content to remain as he was. Slowly his strength returned, and he sat upright, with his back against the cold wall, to look around him. He remembered drinking spiced wine, leaning on the table, and falling asleep. By what means he had been transported to this little room with the rough gray walls, he could not in the least imagine. There was plenty of light from the window; in the corner was his lute; but there was nothing else save the straw on which he lay.

He was about to rise when he heard the rattle of bolts. Reaching for his dagger, he found he had only the little pouch at his belt which contained

strings for his lute. As he leaned on his elbow, faint and dizzy, the door opened, and there walked into the room the same crusty sentinel who had admitted him to the castle, after refusing shelter. He put down a jug of water and a loaf of bread by the side of Raimbaut, and went out without a word. He was a sullen villain, with black hair and sallow skin, the birthright of the Spaniard. Scarce the height of a man, he was of prodigious girth, and carried a long dagger ready in his hand.

No sooner had the door clanged than Raimbaut seized the jug and drank deeply, for his throat was parched. He was so much refreshed that he raised himself to his feet, and staggered to the window, through which came the cool breeze of early morning. At first glance he saw that he was incarcerated in the mountain castle, for he recognized the discolored rocks and the yawning chasm. He knew he was a prisoner. He wondered that the window was so large, and with but a single bar which left a space on either side. When he climbed into the embrasure, however, he saw how unnecessary it was to protect the window, for there was a fall of a thousand feet beneath it. The castle-wall rose without a break from the sheer precipice. It was utterly impossible for an enemy to clamber up, and just as hopeless for a prisoner to try to escape, unless, indeed, he were blessed with wings.

If he had any doubt as to whose prisoner he really was, it was set at rest by the opening of the door and

the appearance of Berguedan. The Spaniard was humming the refrain of, " Oh, love is the wine of life! " as if he had not a care in the world. He entered with a polite bow and no sign of triumph on his smiling face. His " Good morning, Messire Raimbaut; I hope you passed a pleasant night! " was pronounced as easily as if they were joint visitors at Courthézon, and nothing had occurred to mar a friendly acquaintance. He walked quietly over to the corner of the room, took up Raimbaut's lute, and began to play, gently praising the quality of its tone.

Raimbaut watched for several minutes, with difficulty restraining himself. His fingers wandered stealthily to his empty belt, only to realize that, unarmed, he had not a chance against Berguedan, who wore both sword and dagger. At last he forced himself to say calmly, —

" I do not care to discuss either the morning, my night's rest, or the tones of my lute. What do you mean to do with me? Why have you pursued me all these years? "

Berguedan shook his head deprecatingly still strumming softly on the lute, —

" My dear Raimbaut, why should we occupy ourselves with a disagreeable subject? Have you heard this little thing I composed to the praise of the fair Loba? "

With this preamble, he broke into a song in which the charms of the Countess of Cabaret were not too delicately described; and, having finished, he turned

to his unwilling auditor, and inquired with an assumption of deep interest, —

"Tell me truly what you think of it. You know we singers should be frank with each other."

"I will answer this question," replied Raimbaut, "with the understanding that you reply in turn to mine. I think it a foul song, well sung by the vilest demon that ever escaped from the gates of hell. Now keep your promise: answer! Why have you pursued me? What is your plan, now that you have me trapped?"

Berguedan played a few more notes as if loath to lay the lute aside. Then he said, —

"Speaking of traps, it may interest you to know how near I came to losing the game for which I set the toil. You left Cabaret so suddenly that my messenger reached me after Felipe had already sent you from the door, not knowing who you were. Is it not amusing to think of the bird being beaten away from the very snare that was laid for him? Was it not fortunate, when I sent Felipe out into the storm with apologies for his lack of courtesy, that he found you and brought you back? Although he spent half the night searching for Jacques, he failed to discover any trace of him; I fear the good fellow must have stumbled over a precipice in the dark."

"You will pardon me," said Raimbaut, "when I tell you that your story does not entertain me, and remind you of your promise. Why have you pursued me? What is to be my fate?"

" As you insist, I will tell you some of the reasons why I have sought your society ever since our meeting at Courthézon. I shall tell you no falsehood; perhaps not quite the whole truth, but at least a part. I shall make the story short as possible. Are you sure I shall not weary you? "

" I shall not be wearied."

" In the first place, I must declare, my dear friend, that in my heart there is not the least ill-will. Indeed, I long ago took a liking to you, which, under happier circumstances, might have ripened into friendship."

The Spaniard said this with such an affectation of good fellowship that Raimbaut could scarce keep his hands from his enemy's throat.

" It was my misfortune," continued Berguedan, " to be chosen as the ambassador of a very noble family who desired to secure possession of a certain Book of Hours. I tried at first to obtain this from you at Courthézon. You must know it is my nature to take the most direct and honorable course. When this did not succeed, I was forced to follow a more devious path. Unjust suspicion that I had killed the fat Count made my departure from Provence imperative. By my orders, Antoine made his clumsy attempt at Beaucaire, and failed again at Toulouse. It was only a few months ago that I received instructions that not alone was it necessary to obtain the Book, but that your death was essential to the peace and prosperity of many exalted personages. You can

imagine my horror at finding myself bound to carry out such a command?"

"Yes," said Raimbaut quietly; "I can imagine your dismay."

"Thank you, my friend: it is safe to trust one gentleman to understand another. It is not surprising that I was unsuccessful in a mission so foreign to my taste. You escaped the first attack at Cabaret because Antoine, who, I assure you, is not a bad shot, sent his arrow a hand-breadth wild. The second time a sudden turn saved you in the courtyard. Finally, you avoided a most romantic death in the delightful company of Loba, because of this charming lady's bright eyes and brighter wits. There is a woman for you! She has not her equal in all Provence. Tell me, my friend, how did you get the strength to leave her?"

"In order that you may have no least excuse for lying, I will tell you that the Countess Loba wearied of me and sent me away," replied Raimbaut, the blood throbbing fiercely in his veins. The Spaniard's words and manner were alike maddening, and all the time he touched the strings of the lute with careless fingers, making Raimbaut's nerves vibrate with hatred.

"My experience was so revolting to my better nature," Berguedan went on, "that when my last attempt failed at Cabaret, I decided not to follow out the letter of my instructions. I lay in wait for you here. Your wine was flavored by a drug of rare

potency; and when you fell asleep, we brought you to this room. You will notice how fully I am gratifying your natural curiosity? "

" I must thank you," said Raimbaut, adopting in spite of himself Berguedan's suave speech and manner; " I most sincerely thank you for answering one of the questions which I had the honor to put to you. The second, however, in which I asked your present intentions concerning my poor self, you have so far neglected."

" A thousand pardons!" exclaimed Berguedan. " I confess I was half resolved to drop you quietly out of the window, this morning. For your death I am promised many pieces of gold which would jingle merrily in my pocket; but I have not the heart to feed the crows with your comely carcass. I really cannot kill you! Yet, though I permit you to live, your imprisonment must be close and continuous. As far as the outside world is concerned, you are henceforth dead. I shall present the Book of Hours to the lady in whose interest I have acted, tell her a very pathetic story of your last moments, and obtain the prize which, you will admit, I rightly deserve."

" That you may some time obtain a fitting recompense shall be my constant prayer," declared the other scornfully.

" Your appreciation is my greatest reward," continued Berguedan. " Felipe has careful instructions to make you comfortable, and I think you will admit this room to be a very decent cage for a very

handsome bird. I am sure you must have noticed my thoughtfulness in leaving a troubadour the companionship of his lute? And now, Messire Raimbaut, my apologies and farewell. I hope you will not get over-wearied. But if you find life unsupportable, there is always the window, through which you can make a quick escape to heaven."

For a long time Raimbaut sat motionless in the embrasure. At last he stepped down carefully on the floor, for he was still weak and his brain was whirling from the effect of the drug. A few moments he paced up and down, until the full horror of his situation dawned upon him. Then he threw himself against the thick oak door and tore at the cracks until the blood oozed from his finger-tips. He was beating with his clenched fist when the bolts were thrown back and his jailer entered.

"Well, my pretty singing-bird," said he gruffly, "I suppose you either do not like your cage, or are trying your voice. I must ask you to choose some other time for your chansons, as this is the hour for my morning nap, and I grow ugly if disturbed."

He clanged the door behind him, and Raimbaut staggered to the pile of straw, and fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

He did not wake until the dawn of the next day, and was almost restored by his long rest. He considered his situation calmly. It was not pleasant to be a captive, but it was much better than to feed the crows which fluttered over the gorge. There must

be some way to free himself, and he resolved to find it.

More than anything else, his mind was occupied with Berguedan's story. How could he, Raimbaut of Vacqueiras, threaten the peace of any noble family? Of what use was his Book of Hours to them? He now began to realize how much the volume had meant to him. For many years he had read at night and morning from the beautiful pages, and as he put his hand in the empty pocket of his tunic, he felt strangely lonely and bereft. He longed to look again at the pure face of Saint Love, against whom he had so deeply sinned. Then came thoughts of Loba, and his heart was filled with a longing more intense than physical hunger. He could see the tall figure, the red braids, the ever-loving face. Why must he remember it pale and tear-stained, with an expression of unutterable longing? Should he ever hold her in his arms again? Only by grim determination could he forget her for a moment, and turn his mind to plans of escape.

He examined every stone of his prison, every inch of the heavy door which confined him; he looked out of the window and scrutinized the masonry. There was not the least sign of a foothold. His glance followed each crevice of the precipice to the bottom of the gorge where the mountain torrent fumed and fretted. Yes, it would be easy to end it all! As he looked, the height-madness stole over him. Unseen hands seemed to beckon!

Conscious of his danger, he forced himself to leave

the embrasure. He decided that for the present, at least, there was no hope. He realized how important it was to steady his mind by occupation, and resolved to devote himself to his art. He determined to prepare himself then and there for Le Puy, as if no doubt existed of his attendance at the festival. His jailer allowed him pens and parchment on which he could write the words and music which he composed. At last he selected the chanson with which he hoped to win the Golden Sparrow-Hawk. He spent hours each day in song, and in order that he might keep his physical strength, he practised the joglar feats which he had seen Jacques perform, until the blood flowed freely through his veins.

So the first month passed, and the second. Raimbaut saw not the smallest chance of freedom, but he kept a careful record of the days as they passed. He became strangely apathetic, his mind occupied wholly with his work. He had never before had such ideal conditions: there were no diversions, no duties, no exacting friends! There came to him many new thoughts, and he studied the effect of unusual accompaniments on his lute. He even added two more notes to his register, and his whole voice gained in quality and volume.

It was when the festival at Le Puy was almost due that he began to feel vaguely uneasy and dissatisfied. He realized that from the far corners of Provence the little cavalcades were starting out, all intent upon the same goal. He knew that scores of young trouba-

dours were rehearsing the songs with which they hoped to win applause, rich gifts, and perhaps the Golden Sparrow-Hawk itself. No doubt Peire Vidal was riding forth gay and confident, with his patron Barral of Marseille and the beautiful Countess. At this last thought there came an irresistible desire to be free, not alone for freedom's sake, but that he might test his powers against his rival. Each hour he grew more impatient. When the first day of the festival arrived, he found himself unable to touch either lute or pen. As he pictured the gay gathering to himself, his own solitary state seemed doubly forlorn.

Now it was next to the last day. Mid-afternoon found him pacing up and down his room. He could see the face of Peire Vidal smiling and triumphant; and the vision of his success filled Raimbaut's heart with bitterness. He would gladly risk his life to meet his rival at Le Puy. In desperation he climbed into the embrasure, and leaned out as far as he was able. At this angle he discovered, three spear-lengths beneath him, a window like his own. Was it possible for him to enter this embrasure, pass through the castle, and escape? With a good rope it would be a fair hazard. He looked about, as he had done a hundred times before. There were no coverings on his bed which could be torn into strips. He had seen ropes made of straw for the farmer's use, and for several minutes he struggled in a foolish attempt to plait the few wisps on which he slept. He had

nothing but his baldric and his lute-strap. He fastened them together and found he had a strong cord, which he tied firmly to the bar at the window, where it dangled, short and useless. He seized his mantle, and when he found he could not tear it with his fingers, he worried it with his teeth until the threads started; then he ripped the garment into wide shreds. These he tied carefully together and fastened to the end of the baldric. His heart sank within him when he discovered that his cord was still far too short.

Again he searched the room. Was there nothing left? Despair was stealing over him when he gave a sudden cry of joy, and, as a drowning man grasps at an oar, seized the pouch and spread out the contents before him. The two largest strings he felt fairly confident of, and followed with the next two, over which he shook his head in doubt. The last four seemed pitifully small and weak, but he took one to fasten his lute to his shoulder, and putting the remaining three together, found that his cord was just long enough. He drew it up through the window, and, pulling against it with all his strength, tested every part. So far as he could discover, it was sufficient for his weight.

Felipe would soon awake from his siesta. There was not a minute to lose. He crept through the window, twisted the cord around his thigh, dangled for a moment, and then inch by inch slid down the lichen-covered wall. His feet reached the ledge of the window, his hands grasped the rusty bar.

INCH BY INCH SLID DOWN THE LICHEN-COVERED WALL

Now for the first time there came to him a full sense of his danger, and of the fearful depth over which he had hung. The slender cord, made tense by his weight, had vibrated and sounded as if played upon by unseen hands. For an instant he crouched in the embrasure before he obtained complete command of himself.

He peered inside. On the couch in the corner was stretched the gross form of his jailer, bound in slumber. He lay on his back, his tunic open at the throat. By his side, within reach, were his dagger and a bunch of keys. Even as Raimbaut looked, the red eyes opened. As the intruder crept through the window and sprang for the dagger, the half-conscious Spaniard threw himself on the floor, struggling fiercely to reach the ugly weapon, already in Raimbaut's hand. Crushed by the weight of his antagonist, whose grip was on his throat, Raimbaut plunged the long blade again and again, until Felipe's fingers loosened and with one deep groan he rolled back on the floor.

For a moment only Raimbaut watched the blood flow from the hairy breast, and the eyes grow fixed in death. He looked about the room, and, discovering his helmet and hauberk hanging in the corner, he armed himself hastily, and felt a thrill of joy as he grasped again his own Toledo blade. He could find no trace of the Book of Hours, though he searched everywhere, examining even the dead body of his jailer.

Then he seized the bunch of keys and opened the door. There was no sound. He crept down the stairs, threw back the bolts and stole into the court-yard, meeting no one. He hurried to the stables and found, to his delight, that the red roan was quietly feeding in his stall. He buckled the saddle with eager fingers and led the horse over the rattling flags to the outer gate. Here he selected the largest key, which proved the right one. In another instant Raimbaut found himself riding swiftly northward toward Le Puy. He was free at last!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GOLDEN SPARROW-HAWK

When Jacques appeared at Narbonne on the day after his departure from Cabaret with his master, he was bruised and blood-stained. In his search for the pack-horse in the rain, he had fallen over the rocks into a little ravine, where he had lain weak and half-stunned until dawn. Finding no trace of Raimbaut, and deciding that he had gone on to Narbonne, thither he bent his steps.

When he told his story to Ermengarda, she was at first filled with joy to learn that Raimbaut had left Cabaret; but when time went by and he did not make his appearance, she became more and more anxious concerning his fate. The news of Loba's death was a shock to her, and seemed ominous of some sad fate for Raimbaut. Under Ermengarda's direction, every crevice of the rocks was searched where it was possible for Raimbaut to have fallen, but not the least sign of him was discovered.

As the days and the weeks passed there seemed little ground for hope. But, like Jacques, she would never admit even to herself that Raimbaut was dead. No matter how great her doubt, she always insisted that he would appear at Le Puy: with every accent of conviction she would declare, —

"None other than he shall win the Golden Sparrow-Hawk!"

Yet Ermengarda felt very old and weary when she arrived at the city of the festival after her long journey. She ascended at once the high steps to the great cathedral, making her way through the kneeling crowd with scant consideration for those whose devotion she disturbed.

Nostre Dame was thronged with the flower of Provence, listening respectfully as the Bishop inveighed against the luxury and sinfulness of the age. The Countess heard little of the sermon, for she spent her time in looking eagerly about in search of Raimbaut. Finding him not, she had no heart to mingle in the careless crowd after service, and, slipping out, she sought her room at the castle.

In the annals of the festival of the Sparrow-Hawk there was no year quite equal to that of the Count of Polignac. Heraclius, King of the Mountains, as he loved to be called, could not tell the difference between a chanson and a servente. His purse was full, however, and all were pleased to have him patron of the great fair; for they knew there would be no limit either to the extravagance of his entertainment, or the richness of his gifts. The fact that his wealth was spoil from his weaker neighbors, or plunder from the Abbeys, was not considered.

From the very beginning the fates were propitious. The sun laughed by day, the moon smiled at night. Song, feasting and gallantry filled the hours. The

Bishop in his palace at Le Puy, and the Count in his castle at Polignac, vied with each other in the lavishness of their hospitality. There was first a great popular pilgrimage to Mount Anis. Thereafter, even the most devout gave free rein to the pursuit of pleasure. But no matter how late the revelry, or how deep the potations of the evening, each afternoon found all the world at the foot of Saint Michael's rock, which rose like a spearhead from the level plain.

The platform was placed close to the precipice, which acted as a giant sounding-board, and made the faintest note distinguishable. On that gently rising ground, every one in the audience had an uninterrupted view. The left of the stage was occupied by the nobility of Provence. At the right were seated the young troubadours who had come from far and near: all hopeful of winning applause, not a few ambitious for the Golden-Hawk itself.

In the centre of the platform were placed the judges; Heraclius, as patron of the festival, being raised on a little dais. The Count of Ventadorn sat on one side, and on the other was Martin, the jolly Monk of Montaudon. Near him stood the perch to which clung the live Sparrow-Hawk, hooded and motionless. The monk was a permanent judge, and the special custodian of the Hawk. The Count of Ventadorn had officiated before, but it was a new experience for Heraclius. He looked uncomfortable enough in his heavy hauberk, which he boasted was never laid aside except for bed. He was deadly tired

of listening to so many songs. In spite of the honor, he was beginning to wish himself in the saddle again, and he cast many glances at a very pretty chatelaine with whom he had a little affair, and who smiled at him seductively from one of the high seats.

To Ermengarda it had been a week full of anxiety and hope deferred. Day after day she had prayed for Raimbaut's safe arrival, and day after day she had been disappointed. From the first his name had been coupled with that of Peire Vidal: few doubted that one or the other would win the Golden Sparrow-Hawk, and many were willing to lay wagers of value. Count Barral accepted every challenge, there being no limit to his confidence in Peire's success. Another great admirer of Peire was Guilhem of Courthézon. His handsome face and rich costume were much in evidence, and many were the smiles of buxom chatelaines with marriageable daughters who beamed on him, for Guilhem was in every way desirable as a husband.

The adherents of Raimbaut inquired frequently concerning him. Raimon and Bernart grew more and more anxious as time went on. The Countess invariably declared that Raimbaut was sure to arrive before the end of the week. By constant repetition she became quite convinced of the truth of her statement; but the last morning dawned, and hope had almost left her.

As she took her place on the platform, she could have told but little of the occurrences of the previous

days. She knew that of the older troubadours Bertrand, Rogier, and Bernart had sung, and that the last had won the most favor. Borneil, as usual, had presented his song through his joglar. She remembered that Peire Raimon was as nervous as ever, and that Daniel's servente had lost half its value because of the rough voice of the singer.

The greatest measure of success, so far, had come to Arnaut de Maruelh, who had won the Sparrow-Hawk the previous year. He was now the accepted troubadour of Alazais, who had succeeded in interesting her stern husband in the Gay Science, and their little court at Beziers was already famous for its patronage.

When Arnaut sang his beautiful chanson, "As swim the fish in waters clear and ample," Ermengarda forgot her trouble for the moment and joined in the hearty applause. The congratulations were very evenly divided between the troubadour and the lady whom he praised, and he received a glance from Alazais which raised him to the seventh heaven of happiness.

Of the younger troubadours, most of whom were quite unknown to Ermengarda, she remembered only Pons of Chapteuil and Miraval. The latter had sung smoothly and well, but to Pons came the greater favor, for his castle was only a few miles away on the Black Mountain, and he received the support of many neighbors and friends.

All this time the audience was growing impatient to hear Vidal and Raimbaut. Count Barral, how-

ever, would not allow Peire to sing yet, for he did not wish to weaken the impression his favorite might make, by allowing Raimbaut's appearance later on.

The sun was approaching the western hills, shining brightly on the audience scattered about the green plain, lighting up the faces of those on the platform, and being reflected from the roof of the miniature church of Saint Michael which crowned the summit of the rock.

In another hour the festival would be over, and the image of the Golden-Hawk, which Heraclius held in his hand, would be given to the most deserving. In the pauses between the songs, the audience became insistent in their cries of " Peire! " and " Raimbaut! " This was maddening to Peire, anxious to show himself, and eager for applause. It was all Barral could do to keep him silent, as he strained at the leash like a hound who hears the sound of the horn.

At last the long list of singers seemed to be exhausted, and the silence was broken by a discontented murmur of the crowd and shouts of, —" Where is Raimbaut of Vacqueiras? " — " Let us hear the nightingale of Marseille! "

Barral realized that the right moment had arrived. No sooner had he given the word, than Peire tripped on to the stage, bowing and smiling to right and left. He was followed by no less than three joglars with instruments. The applause that greeted him was as honey to his soul. A little man with olive face, bright black eyes, and a pointed beard, he wore a costume

over-elaborate; for nothing could restrain his bourgeois love of bright colors. With his first note, however, every one forgot that he was small and vain and foolish. He carolled like a lark, his voice mounting higher and higher until it seemed to disappear in the clouds above them. No one was in doubt as to the lady of his praise, for he cast languishing glances at the beautiful Countess of Marseille as he sang, —

"I stand like one who, dazzled by the light,
Stares at a casement radiant with the west;
The thought of you brings tumult to my breast,
My senses swoon and Wisdom takes to flight.
Love with his myrtle branches buffets me
Because I once, bending a reverent knee,
Stole from my lady's lips one blissful kiss; —
Alas for those who such a rapture miss!"

Peire had just been welcomed back to Marseille, after a month's banishment for kissing the sleeping Countess, and only the repeated solicitations of Barral himself had availed with the indignant lady. This story, known to all, added a double zest to the song.

When Peire had finished, Heraclius tossed a bag of gold at his feet, and the audience applauded with the utmost enthusiasm. Those who had appeared before suffered total eclipse. There were cries of "More! More!" Peire, nothing loath, was about to sing again, but was stopped by the Monk of Montaudon, who never failed to enforce his edict of a single lyric.

When the excitement over Vidal's appearance had sufficiently subsided, a pale-faced youth sang a wretched song with a worse manner. At this the more impatient of the audience began to move uneasily on their seats. Ermengarda and Jacques lost their last ray of hope. The latter, at the risk of life and limb, had climbed each day to a little shelf of rock which he had no difficulty in monopolizing, for no one else was able to reach it. From this place of vantage he could see all that occurred on the platform, yet survey also the broad road that led through the town. Again and again during the afternoon Ermengarda found herself watching Jacques' melancholy figure, for she knew that the joglar's keen eye would be the first to discover his master, should Providence permit the latter to reach Le Puy.

The Countess was suddenly startled by a cry, and saw Jacques slide from his high seat as if struck by lightning. In another instant a dust-stained horseman came spurring through the crowd on a destrier which stumbled and fell exhausted in front of the platform. The rider staggered from the saddle, climbed the steps, and doffing his helmet, revealed the pale face of Raimbaut. He wore a hauberk; over his shoulder dangled his lute. Bernart sprang forward and seized him in his arms. Raimon embraced him with hardly less enthusiasm. From lip to lip the news spread that at last Raimbaut had arrived: Raimbaut the son of Peirol, the pupil of

Bernart, the protégé of Raimon and Ermengarda; Raimbaut who had overthrown Berguedan in the lists; Raimbaut whom Alazais and Loba had loved.

For a moment he stood with his hand clasped in Bernart's, and then he looked eagerly about him in search of a laughing face framed by auburn braids. Loba was not at Le Puy? He wondered why. Then he discovered Ermengarda's plain features, drawn and haggard with excitement. He made his way to her, and, falling on his knee, kissed her hand. It was a pretty sight; and many a young beauty was jealous of the homely chatelaine.

"I almost gave up hope," declared Ermengarda. "I pray you fail me not now, for I would not have the Golden Sparrow-Hawk won by a puppet. Show them how a real man can sing."

"I will do my best," Raimbaut answered. "But I must sit here a moment to get my breath, for I have ridden at speed for a night and a day."

Up to this time every singer had appeared clad in what he considered his most attractive costume. Most of them had received every assistance that could be gained from the tailor and the hair-dresser, and some, at least, had not disdained those little accessories which give bloom to the complexion and a proper curve to the eyebrow.

If Raimbaut had studied for effect, he could not have chosen better than to appear, as he did, in a costume the very color of which was overlaid by the dust of the highway. The prison pallor only added

to the strength and beauty of his face. Yes, it was a real man who took his place there in the sunlight.

Next to Ermengarda sat an old baron bronzed by the suns of Palestine.

"What a knight this one would make!" said he, turning to the Countess.

Beyond him was a handsome chatelaine, who replied, —

"A knight indeed, but it would be a pity to spoil a lover so debonair."

It was not Raimbaut's handsome face, his well-knit figure, the poise of his head, or his quiet smile, which won the audience before he sang a note. There was an inherent charm that caught and held the heart of every one who saw him that day at Le Puy. He seemed to take every one into his confidence, as he looked about, and won friends with every glance. He had no joglar: he tuned his lute carefully, touching it with fingers that lingered lovingly on every string. Then there came a great silence, and he sang the song that had come to him in prison, the song which was to make him famous throughout Languedoc: —

"O Life, I love you; for to me you bring
The purple dawn, the first soft breath of spring,
The fragrance of the hedgerow-hidden flowers,
The lark's clear chanson, and the April showers; —
When in the west Day drops her golden ring,
The ardent nightingale begins to sing;
The harvest moon shines through the silent hours
And Love burns brightest when the darkness lowers;
O Life, I love you!

"You give me strength to don my armor bright:
You valor bring; from you I gain the might
To poise a lance, and with tall pennon flying,
To wield my sword, the fear of death defying; —
When Count and Chatelaine with maid and knight
Are gathered 'neath the torches' crimson light,
You bid me sing, to noble words applying
The lute's soft notes, now jocund and now sighing; —
O Life, I love you!

"I bless you for this land; 't is here alone
The Sun and Wind rule from an equal throne; —
Here nightingale and meadow-lark may hover
O'er rose and primrose, hidden in the clover; —
Here joy and valor, song and love have thrown
A spell where'er the wandering winds have blown;
Here every peering moonbeam can discover
A gracious lady, and her loyal lover; —
O Life, I love you!

"Wind of Provence! O waft me to the place
Where dwells my lady with the blissful face,
Sun of Provence! O guide me with your beaming
To Perfect Love of which my heart is dreaming; —
O Life, I love you!"

There was a little catch of the breath as he began, "O Life, I love you!" and he paused after the words as if his emotion were too strong for utterance. Every tone of his voice was full of gratitude and the joy of life. Many were made aware that the man who stood before them, so pale and passionate, had been through some experience which brought him face to face with death.

Raimbaut mastered himself and sang with no hint of doubt or uncertainty, the artist dominating him.

His voice lacked the range of Peire Vidal's, yet it was so rich and full of feeling that no one thought of it as a mere voice; no one questioned its compass or its quality. When he finished, there followed the praise of utter silence. Then there came a cry, and like a mighty storm the applause swept over the whole great audience. Those on the platform vied with the multitude on the plain.

When Raimbaut made his way quietly to his seat, the Lady Ermengarda put her arm around his neck and kissed him on the forehead.

The song appealed to the soul of every listener. The joy of life, valor, song, love, but more than all else, the praise of Provence, won their hearts. Although the judgment of the audience was unmistakable, the decision of the judges was impatiently awaited. Ermengarda, remembering Heraclius' dislike for Raimbaut, long ago at Toulouse, had her misgivings; but the Count of Polignac had been quite won over by the sight of a troubadour in armor, and he conferred eagerly with his two companions. It was with difficulty that Heraclius made himself heard in a short speech plainly composed by some one else, and laboriously committed to memory. The ovation exceeded all bounds when he ended by announcing the name, — "Raimbaut of Vacqueiras."

The sun was sending its last level beams across the plain when the chain was thrown over Raimbaut's head, and the Golden Sparrow-Hawk, of which he had dreamed so long, dangled from his neck.

In spite of his great losses and bitter disappointment, Count Barral was the first to present his congratulations. Peire Vidal, however, was furious. He could not believe his ears; but when his eyes confirmed the fact that he had lost the prize of which he felt so certain, his rage knew no bounds. He inveighed against the judges in a voice now strident, now querulous, and at last broke into a flood of tears. Indeed, thanks only to infinite patience and forbearance, did Raimbaut succeed in avoiding a quarrel with his angry rival.

Bernart's face beamed with joy. He compared the little image, worn smooth by time, which had hung about his neck for so many years, with the new Sparrow-Hawk of which Raimbaut had just gained possession, every line of which showed the fresh cut of the carver's tool. Count Raimon was benevolence itself, as he said, —

" I am selfish enough to claim that we taught you something at Toulouse, in spite of my Lady Ermengarda's monopoly of you."

Alazais was a trifle conscious, but gave Raimbaut a cool little hand and complimented him very prettily on his success.

" God knows," he replied, " that I should not wear this Golden-Hawk but for your old kindness and patience. Believe me when I say I am not ungrateful."

He had scarcely finished when he received a cheery buffet between the shoulders and turned to face the Monk of Montaudon.

" Well, my lad," he cried out, " we know that you can fight and are certain that you can sing, but to-night we shall discover how many flagons of wine you can empty and say a Pater Noster without a hiccough."

The evening was spent at Polignac; the feast ended not until the dawn showed gray at the castle windows, and changed the light of the torches to a sickly yellow.

But Raimbaut was not at the feast. When the story of Loba's death was told him by Ermengarda, the joy of his triumph turned to ashes. He left the hall without a word, climbed a turret of the castle, and all night long stood looking southward toward the towers of Cabaret. The memory of the woman whose passion was too deep for her to accept a half-love in return, filled his heart with infinite sadness, bitter self-reproach. Should he ever find so perfect a love again?

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BRIDGE OF BENIZET

THE morrow brought rich gifts to Raimbaut. He was overwhelmed with invitations. The winner of the Sparrow-Hawk was welcome to every castle in Provence. Sweet words and bright smiles greeted him on all sides, and memories of Loba gave him an air of melancholy which made him doubly interesting. One only of all the guests at Polignac seemed unfriendly: this was none other than Guilhem of Courthézon. He was well-grown, well-mannered, handsome as Adonis. He showed his mocking spirit to Raimbaut alone, whose triumph he belittled; but he soon received a merited rebuff which deterred him from any open exhibition of dislike.

One evening, when Raimbaut was in the middle of his song, Guilhem sent his helmet clattering to the floor. Although he apologized profusely, and explained that it was an accident which he greatly regretted, the innumerable frowns and black looks bestowed upon him were a warning which he knew he could not ignore.

Raimbaut charmed every one by the modest way in which he bore the honors heaped upon him, and by his generosity made friends with all the troubadours. In spite of the rivalry between them, a certain good fellowship allied them against the rich

nobles to whom they looked for patronage. News of any ill treatment, or of parsimony, ran from lip to lip, until the offender found his castle avoided, and was deprived of the entertainment which he best loved.

Wherever Raimbaut went he was received with enthusiasm. His songs were compared with those of Bernart, Borneil, and Daniel; and however they might be criticised on the parchment, yet as sung by himself they seemed perfection. His resentment against Berguedan was too deep to find expression. He told no one the details of his experience in the little tower among the rocks, but he resolved that he would cut his enemy's career short the moment he could reach him. The Spaniard, however, seemed to have dropped out of existence; no matter where he inquired, Raimbaut could not obtain the least clue to his whereabouts.

On all sides it was expected that Raimbaut would choose some patroness to whom he could dedicate himself, and there were few chatelaines or demoiselles unwilling to become his lady of song. But he went his way, and sang with a catholic devotion for all. He was protected from dissipation and low intrigues by the love of his art, and applied himself to the perfection of his powers, giving his mornings either to play in the tennis-court, or to rides far afield with falcon on wrist. He loved the wandering life, and often deserted the castle for the winding road. He would linger for days together in some wood-cutter's

cottage, or sleep in the open with no curtain between himself and the sky. At these times there came to him the old restless dream of a Perfect Love, for the hope of his childhood stirred in his heart. He prayed for Loba's eternal rest, with tears.

It was early autumn when Raimbaut reached Cavaillon. Only a day's journey away, he despatched Jacques with instructions to obtain from Anselme full information concerning the condition of affairs at Vacqueiras and Courthézon.

At the end of the week, Raimbaut arrived at a little inn at Avignon, which was the appointed rendezvous. Here he was pleased to find, not only Jacques, but Anselme also. The holy priest's hair had become as white as snow, but his eyes were unchanged. Raimbaut looked into them with affection, and fell on his knees to receive a blessing from a voice tremulous with emotion. Anselme begged him again not to visit Vacqueiras. He warned him that it was certain to complicate matters for Peirol, who had been allowed by his over-lord to live in peace.

" Moreover," he continued, " I must tell you that although I have no hope that your father will ever be his old self again, he is growing less moody and more intelligent. I fear that the excitement of your visit might stop this slow improvement and result in permanent injury."

Anselme brought a message of love from Michonne. From Thibaud there was no word, for the old man-at-arms had at last been cut down by the sword of

death. Raimbaut listened patiently to all the priest told him, and agreed reluctantly that it was impossible for him to return to the brown castle.

It was almost noon when they decided to seek out Benizet, who, as they learned, could be found at work at the bridge. They descended the steep street slowly, for Anselme had grown feeble, and, passing through the gate, found themselves surrounded by a bustling hive of men, who were moving in and out of a forest of stones.

The visitors made their way with some difficulty to the bridge, of which three arches were completed. Raimbaut looked with awe at the mighty structure, the like of which he had never seen. It seemed as if nothing less than a miracle could have accomplished so great a task. He required no guide to find Benizet, for he could be plainly seen on a pile of stones at the far end of the bridge, overlooking the rushing water. His head was bare, his robe girt high at the waist; he appeared a veritable Samson as he gave orders with sonorous voice, and pointed about him with a huge finger.

Benizet first recognized Anselme, and, leaping from his high perch, threw himself at the feet of the old priest murmuring, —

"Give me your blessing!"

As he caught sight of Raimbaut, his red face fairly shone with joy.

"Truly," he exclaimed, "this is better than the festival when we have completed an arch! Often

have I thought of you and much has been told me of your triumphs."

"Nay," replied Raimbaut, "I have accomplished nothing to compare with this achievement of yours. Benizet, I little thought, when you left me with your goatherd's crook over your shoulder, that you would succeed like this."

"It is the hand of God," said Benizet solemnly. "Yet all cannot be bridge-builders. There is other work for consecrated hearts. I hope you have not forgotten this in your prosperity? Tell me something of your experience."

"It must be either a very long or a very short story," replied Raimbaut, "and I choose the latter. Thanks to the teaching of Bernart and the kindness of good Count Raimon, I so succeeded in perfecting myself in my art that I won the Golden Sparrow-Hawk at Le Puy. Since then, I have gone from castle to castle, receiving much favor and many gifts."

"Good!" ejaculated Benizet with a smile, "for I well know you will give me a share of your gains. I relieve, for their souls' good, all those who suffer under the burden of riches."

Raimbaut laughed.

"I shall be only too pleased to have a part in your grand work. If it would not spoil my fingers for the lute, I should like nothing better than to spend a few days laboring here in the sun. I learned how you carried the first stone to the river; that tale has spread

through all Provence. Tell me how you were able to raise such a mighty structure."

"It has not been easy, Messire Raimbaut. We have been much troubled by the quicksands, but have conquered them. In all things I followed the guidance of the beloved saints of God, and this bridge is but a duplicate of the one you saw me building in the brook at Vacqueiras. I chose to form each arch with one hundred stones like that with which I gained the Bishop's good-will. All praise belongs to blessed Saint Christopher, my patron, for it was he who inspired my visions. I cannot carry our Lord Christ over the river on my back as did he, but I can build a bridge over which many devout Christians can flock to Church. They have made me Master of the Order of Bridge-Builders, an office for which I am not fit, yet I must tell you that, since I came to Avignon, I have learned to read and know sufficient Latin to follow the words of the Holy Mass and the Office."

Benizet now discovered Jacques, who, remembering old differences with the goatherd, had remained in the background; but no sooner did the latter set eyes on the little joglar, than he greeted him heartily, and gave him his benediction.

"How is my good Jacques?" he asked. "We were once a trifle jealous of each other over this handsome master of yours whom you have served so well during all these years. What do you think of this bridge of mine? See how the river rushes

against it! See how the Rhone-dragon casts his arms up the buttress and strains against the foundation! Ah, Jacques, what a mill you could run if you had a wheel placed under where we stand!"

The goatherd had a word of encouragement for all about him, and it was wonderful to see the eagerness of their service.

"Aha!" said he to a rough peasant who staggered under a block of stone, "'t is a man's load you carry!" giving him a buffet as he passed. A moment later a little chap shuffled along, trembling from his exertions. Benizet gave him an encouraging smile and said, "Well done, my brother! Be sure you overtask not yourself." Then to Raimbaut and Anselme, "Do you know that I have come to value the labor of the weak? God Almighty has given me the strength of three, but though I could easily carry yon fellow with the load he bears, I doubt not he will receive equal credit from the righteous One who understands all things."

He now invited his guests to enter the building, in which were kept the plans for the bridge. Here he introduced them to an Italian, who was working over the drawings of a miniature church. Benizet pointed to this with great pride.

"It is," said he, "a chapel which I propose to build on this very spot. It is to be dedicated to good Saint Christopher, and instead of toll, every one who passes will enter and say a prayer."

Learning that the Italian had arrived but a few

days before at Avignon, Raimbaut asked, as was his custom, whether during his travels he had by any chance heard of one Berguedan, a troubadour of Catalonia.

"I have," replied the Italian. "But four weeks ago, when I left Rome, this same Berguedan was paying court to a young Countess whose husband was in Palestine. He will regret his gallantry when the Count returns, for the latter possesses a short temper and a long dagger."

"At last, at last, I have a clue!" exclaimed Raimbaut. He whispered to Jacques so that Benizet and Anselme might not hear: "We leave for Rome within the hour."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SAINT BIATRITZ

It was a gray Lenten morning. As Raimbaut and Jacques rode out of Valenza the city was swallowed up by the mists and disappeared as if by enchantment. The fog hung heavy above the river, spread ghostlike over the plain. The whole world seemed bound in a spell of silence. There was something uncanny in the clinging vapor which shut off all view but that of their horses' ears, pricked forward in uncertainty, and all sound but the regular splash of hoofs in the muddy road.

For a long time no word was spoken. At last the suspense was too much for Jacques.

"They may praise the hills and valleys of Piedmont if they wish, but give me Provence, the 'land of the wind and sun,' where the mist does not blind my eyes, nor drop from the end of my nose. A murrain take all Italy, say I! We have met naught but misfortune since we first set foot in the country."

"You are right," replied Raimbaut. "We have not passed a happy year. Even the elements were against us, for we ran into the storm when we were scarce twelve hours from Marseille, and only by a miracle did we escape the sea."

"A bad omen! And when the master of the ship was undecided whether to go on or to return to

Marseille to replace his torn sails, it would have been well for us had he followed the latter course."

"Day after day we had a head wind which seemed to warn us of misfortune. Yes, Jacques, ill-luck has never left us since we departed from Provence. God grant we may soon set eyes again upon our land of the 'rose and nightingale!'"

"Then there was your fever at Rome; my fall in Florence, which spoiled my tumbling for a cursed three months; and the robbery at Pavia, which left us nothing but the clothes on our backs."

"Alas! Then for the first time since we left Vacqueiras did my heart wholly fail me, as I bent over you, silent and blood-stained."

"I was properly punished for my clumsiness. No peasant lad should have failed at such an easy feat; and I, a joglar of renown through all Provence!"

"You were weak for lack of food, lad, and had starved yourself that I might eat."

"Indeed, no, my master! I was growing far too fat to tumble. 'T is one of the duties of our craft to fight against the temptations of cup and platter. Faith! all days are fast-days with us, from Lady Day to Candlemas."

"Truly," laughed Raimbaut, looking affectionately at the plump little fellow who rode by his side, "I should call you a royal trencher-man. See how that poor nag is bending beneath your weight."

"He has a fine hollow back into which the saddle fits like a nest in the branch of a tree. He would

make a noble destrier, for once seated on him, a knight would be safe, no matter how fierce the shock! Was it not fortunate that the thieves failed to find your sword and armor, and despised your lute?"

"Yes, they did not think it worth the carrying off, though it has not its equal in this whole world. I pray the saints that if I ever reach Heaven I may not be forced to change it for a golden harp."

"And yet they left us without a silver piece. It would not have mattered had we been in Provence, where every door swings open at our touch; but it was dismal to be penniless so far from home. Do you remember the wretched garments in which we clothed ourselves? You could cover your rags with your hauberk, but as for me, I dared not tumble for fear I should come forth naked through one of the big rents, like Adam into Eden."

At this Raimbaut broke into a hearty laugh, but his face darkened as he said, —

"It was then that Abert of Malaspina jeered at my shabby appearance, and asked whether in Provence beggars and troubadours belonged to the same guild? Again he reminded me of my poverty at Genoa, where I was flouted by the lady to whom he was secretly paying court. It has been a sad experience from first to last. I have met a few liberal barons, and some gracious dames, but the women, beautiful as they are, demand too much here in Italy."

"Against their husbands, may all angels protect us!" exclaimed Jacques. "Even I had my narrow

escapes, and I quaked whenever a lady smiled upon you."

"They have no liking for a troubadour, because they do not understand his life. I sing the praise of a chatelaine with all reverence and courtliness. Her lord hears the song, is jealous of the singer, and tries to stick a dagger between my ribs!"

"Your shirt of mail has saved you a dozen times."

"It is not cold steel that I greatly fear," declared Raimbaut, "but a few grains in my platter of that flavoring which is neither salt nor pepper. Certes, I should have died from poison, had not the jealous Count at Pisa been too zealous and given me an overdose."

"Moreover, that villain Berguedan has led us a hopeless chase and brought us great misfortune. From Rome to Florence, from Pisa to Genoa, from Milan to this muddy road have we followed him. He has avoided us as if his friend the devil gave warning of our approach."

"Yet we have never been on such a hot scent as now. He went to the Castle of the Vale but a week ago, and the Count of Valenza had no news of his departure. I cannot understand how Bonifaz can receive him, even in the company of Guilhem of Courthézon, who, they say, is a suitor for the hand of Biatritz."

"Indeed," said Jacques, looking at his master a little doubtfully, "it would have saved the hangman a

task had you finished the treacherous Spaniard when you had him at your mercy in the lists at Toulouse."

To this Raimbaut made no answer, and, in the silence which followed, his mind was occupied with thoughts, many of which were not pleasant. He asked himself if after all his life had not been a failure. How had he kept his high resolve? How had he succeeded in his quest of the Perfect Love? He remembered, as if it were yesterday, the tragic moment when Death waited for him with open jaws at the foot of the steep crag of the Devil's Tooth. How sincere he had been, how devoted, how enthusiastic when, in the presence of Anselme, he had slashed his mantle, and sworn to follow Saint Martin in a life of purity and love! How faithfully he had trodden the holy way until the presence of Berguedan filled his heart with hatred! Every day, every hour of his life at Cabaret passed before him. In spite of true repentance, how often had he longed to hold Loba in his arms again: Loba, whose beautiful body was long since food for worms! At the thought of her, his soul was full of sadness and regret. He had succeeded beyond his most sanguine hopes in his life of song. He was known as a troubadour without a rival. Yet the mantle on his shoulder told its story: for instead of being severed from collar to hem, it showed only an indistinguishable fragment cut from the corner as a proof of how lightly he had come to value his vow. Although he never regretted his oath of purity, he had almost given up his faith in Perfect

Love. As his thoughts came down through the years to that very moment, he tried to gather his wits together in preparation for his meeting with Bonifaz. How well he remembered the deplorable quarrel at Toulouse and his friend's declaration, —

"I will balance our oath of comradeship against the indignity of this blow, and call them both cancelled. The insult and the friendship are alike forgotten."

Raimbaut realized that on him alone rested all the blame for the estrangement. He was quite ready to confess this and ask for pardon. He longed to have the old friendship restored, yet he was not certain of a kind reception, nor eager to reach the Castle of the Vale.

"Shall we stay long at Pomaro, think you?" asked Jacques.

"I cannot tell," replied Raimbaut. "We may not stop at all. Bonifaz has become a famous knight; all Italy rings with his praise. He may not condescend to let us in."

Jacques shrugged his shoulders eloquently, and for several minutes they rode in silence through the mist. Suddenly, Raimbaut's revery was broken by a scream ahead, a hoarse cry for help, and the clatter of angry steel. They could judge of distance only by the sense of hearing, for the March fog still hid everything in an impenetrable veil.

Raimbaut slipped his helmet on his head, and drew his sword. Jacques wriggled hurriedly into his

padded coat, and pulled the strap of his steel cap under his chin. Full of doubt as to what was before them, they spurred their horses along the level road, swung around a sharp curve, and found themselves in the midst of a fierce mêlée.

As they dashed into the group of struggling men, Jacques' horse bowled over one of the combatants, and stumbling heavily, sent his rider over his head crashing to the ground. For a moment Raimbaut sat his horse, uncertain. Jacques lay where he had fallen; there was another form stretched on the ground; and a third sorry wretch leaned on his elbow, able only to groan. On one side of the road were a half dozen surly men huddled together, each with a high iron helmet on his head. They were confused by the unexpected appearance of Raimbaut, and doubtful whether to stand their ground or take to flight.

On the other side, in front of a wayside shrine, there stood a gaunt man-at-arms. His sword was in his hand, its point resting on the grass, his gray head dripping from a ghastly wound. He was well-nigh spent. At sight of him, and in answer to the agonizing appeal in the old man's eyes, Raimbaut slipped from his horse. In the same instant the tall figure tottered and fell forward, revealing the slender form of a demoiselle standing motionless in the niche of the shrine.

Raimbaut fell on his knees and crossed himself. It was a vision of Saint Love! He neither spoke nor

stirred, until a heavy hand on his shoulder woke him from his dream. He sprang to his feet and found himself face to face with a sturdy man-at-arms, who louted clumsily and said, —

"We are townsmen of Vercelli, at odds with the Marquis of Monferrat. This demoiselle is the Lady Biatritz, a daughter of the house, whom we propose to hold as hostage to protect ourselves from her brother's aggression. To her we shall do no harm. I know not who you are, and care not, if you choose to go your way. We are able to take the demoiselle in spite of you. If you are discreet, you will remount your horse. It is no affair of yours. Oppose us, and you will in no wise help the maid, but will serve a banquet for the crows, even now calling together over our heads, having scented blood."

When he had finished, Raimbaut lifted his eyes up to the sun, which was breaking through the mists. "Good saints all," said he under his breath, "I thank you for this day!" Then he looked straight at the man before him, who snarled impatiently, —

"We are in no mood to wait for an answer. I do not wish to kill you, for I see you are a pretty singer of songs, and not a knight. I pray you mount your horse, and save your white skin."

"Enough!" replied Raimbaut, laughing aloud. "I confess I am more skilful with the lute, yet I have held a steel blade in my hand before, and I will do my poor best with it now. Between riding away, and a quick death in defence of the saint of this

"MAY GOD HELP THE RIGHT! EN GARDE, MESSIEURS"

shrine, I am not slow to choose. May God help the right! *En garde, Messieurs!*"

He had hardly spoken when the leader made a lunge at him; but so quick was the counter-stroke that it caught his antagonist full in the neck where the hauberk met the helmet. The man fell, with the blood gushing from his throat. In another instant Raimbaut was attacked by five eager blades. The men of Vercelli rushed at him fiercely, jostling one another in their impatience to strike the first blow.

Raimbaut's sword was like a flame; one of his assailants cried out, another fell back, and the rest followed in confusion.

"'Sdeath!" cried he. "Are you so easily satisfied, my brave men of Vercelli? You do not like the tune a troubadour plays with his sword? I' faith," said he, over his shoulder, "you may trust me, sweet Saint Love. I swear they shall not come near you."

His voice was like a trumpet, his face bright with the joy of conflict as he met the second attack. But the men of Vercelli had now learned their lesson. Two only approached boldly in front, while two others watched warily on either side, ready to give an unexpected blow. Of what followed Raimbaut could never remember much, for the love of battle was strong upon him. They never ceased their attack, planning to wear out an opponent to whom they gave not an instant's rest. Once Raimbaut was beaten to his knees; but at a little cry from the niche behind

him he struggled to his feet, and fought so desperately that again his assailants drew back into the road.

All this while the mists were fading, and the day was brightening. Suddenly some one gave a shout and pointed through the trees. Raimbaut could discern a strong castle out of which galloped a cavalcade, well-armed and mounted. As he watched them there came another cry, and when he turned he could see nothing but the backs of the men of Vercelli scattering among the trees and disappearing like a flock of partridges. He quickly drew the helmet from his head and bent his knee before the shrine.

"Sweet Saint Love," said he, "I thank God that to me has been given the honor of your defence. It is you who have inspired me, and guided every stroke of my sword."

Again Raimbaut felt the benison of the clear brown eyes which looked into his. And now right well he knew it was no vision.

"First to the saints to whom I prayed, and then to your own strong arm and stout heart, belong the glory," said the demoiselle. "No vision am I, as you will quickly learn when you lift me to the ground. I fear our poor Renato is beyond helping. Alas, my heart is sore to see him lying so still!"

She held out her hand, but he gently took her in his arms and placed her on her feet by the side of the old man. He then seized his helmet and hurried away to a brook that he could hear trickling among

the trees. When he returned with the water in his morion, he found Biatritz with Renato's head in her lap, his eyes already glazed in death. She closed the heavy lids with her slender fingers and whispered De Profundis for the departed spirit, Raimbaut a kneeling by her side.

It was thus that Bonifaz discovered them when he arrived at the head of the little cavalcade. He sprang from his horse, and making his way over the recumbent figure in the road, first assured himself that Biatritz was unharmed; then he turned to Raimbaut. The two friends looked in each other's eyes. Raimbaut's parched lips opened, and he said,—

"I was in the wrong. I pray you pardon me!"

"You have already atoned," replied Bonifaz. "More than this, you have won a right to wear golden spurs by a splendid feat of arms. Here is an act of bravery, untarnished by hatred or revenge, such as you vowed to accomplish after your combat with Berguedan."

He dropped the hand he had clasped in proof of renewed comradeship, paused a moment, and giving Raimbaut a swinging buffet on the neck, declared,—

"Raimbaut of Vacqueiras, with this stroke I dub you a knight indeed. May you be always brave and true."

As Raimbaut stood with bowed head, in his heart a great joy, he heard a voice, every accent of which was full of feeling,—

"May you be faithful to God! May you be loyal

to your lady! May the saints give you always a strong arm and a pure heart!"

When he turned, the sun had broken through the mist, and was shining into the recess of the lichen-covered shrine. In front of it stood Biatritz, her face transfigured in the sunlight, her hair a halo around her head.

"Sweet Lady Biatritz," he replied, "I am undeserving both of knighthood and your blessing. Yet will I strive to become worthy, with your help, and that of good Saint Martin, my patron."

"And now," cried Bonifaz, heartily, "enough of solemn vows and exhortations! We must send assistance to these poor beggars whom you have carved so skilfully. Old Renato has died as he would wish, in defence of his lady. God rest his soul! Now let us mount our horses and return to the castle, where I can promise you something to quench your thirst."

They made their way across the road, where their horses stood among the trees. Raimbaut's mind had been so occupied that he had quite forgotten Jacques, until he discovered him leaning pale and trembling against a tree. The poor fellow looked up with a sickly smile and said, —

"Instead of glory, this morning has brought me only a sore head. I came to myself just in time to see you receive the buffet of knighthood through a shower of meteors. I should be well kicked for the clumsiness which left you to fight alone."

"You were lucky not to break your neck," declared Bonifaz. "Your cap is flattened, and the blood is dripping from your chin. If he who suffers most deserves most, to you should come the honors of this morning."

They helped Jacques climb on the sorry beast that had given him his fall. Raimbaut lifted Biatritz on to her palfrey, and, mounting his own horse, galloped toward the castle in the midst of a cavalcade, every face in which was bright with friendship and admiration. Indeed, it seemed hardly possible that a short half hour before he had been groping along the road from Valenza, his heart full of loneliness. It had been a golden morning. He had enjoyed a glorious struggle of arms; he had won his spurs; he had regained the love of his old comrade. More than all else, he had bowed at the shrine of sweet Saint Biatritz.

They had almost reached the castle when Raimbaut's brow suddenly grew black. He turned to Bonifaz and inquired eagerly, —

"Tell me, is Berguedan at the castle?"

"He is not," replied Bonifaz. "He came in the retinue of Guilhem of Courthézon, but I flatly refused to receive him. Guilhem was greatly surprised and very apologetic, for he is a suitor for my sister Biatritz, and it was an unfortunate beginning for his visit."

"I have an errand with that Catalonian," declared Raimbaut, "which has long been delayed. He has escaped me repeatedly, though I have followed him

for many weary months. Is an alliance to be arranged with the house of Courthézon? Is it the same mocking Guilhem that I knew so well?"

"I confess I do not altogether like the man," said Bonifaz, "but my good father has set his heart upon the marriage. I am expecting every day some message from him, and shall no doubt receive instructions when the first ship from Palestine reaches Genoa. Guilhem stayed with us only a few days, but returns after a visit to Turin. Whither Berguedan went I cannot tell."

"I should not delay to follow him," declared Raimbaut, "yet I cannot deny myself the pleasure of a week with you before I take up the pursuit again."

"A week, say you!" cried Bonifaz. "The Castle of the Vale is now your home. Are we not comrades in arms as in the old days? You shall not leave me in a week, nor a full round year. Do not force me to cast you into a dungeon to keep you at my side."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CASTLE OF THE VALE

When Raimbaut rode into the courtyard of the Castle of the Vale it did not seem possible, in spite of Bonifaz' friendly threat, that it could contain within its towers a single dungeon. The sunlight filled it, flowers bloomed along the walls, and ivy covered the rough stones with a veil of green. In one corner was a huge chestnut tree, gorgeous with its pink blooms. The varlets had smiling faces, and sprang eagerly forward to hold the horses' bridles. The very wind seemed to breathe friendliness, for it was soft and genial.

When he dismounted he felt a sharp twinge of pain in his thigh, and again when he assisted Biatritz to alight. As he climbed the steps he could not avoid a limp, which Bonifaz did not fail to notice. So, in defiance of Raimbaut's protests, he was carried to his room by two stout men-at-arms and carefully examined by Bonifaz, who discovered that his friend had slightly strained a tendon. After a hot bath and a good rub-down with a fragrant lotion, he found himself almost wholly restored. He had dinner in his own room, but rose in the late afternoon, and leaning on Bonifaz' shoulder, walked without difficulty to the library. This was a large apartment between the chambers of Bonifaz and Biatritz, into which no stranger or formal

friend was ever admitted. In it were many precious books; the walls were covered with beautiful hangings; and on the floor were rugs from the far Orient. Close by the window was a high tapestry-frame, in front of which sat Biatritz, busy with the shining silks and richly colored worsteds.

She rose as Raimbaut entered, and arranged the cushion on a low couch, upon which he was glad to sink. She drew her tapestry-frame so that it screened the bright sunlight; for though the afternoon was showery, at that moment the clouds parted and the dazzling rays streamed through the window. When Bonifaz had seated himself on a tawny lion's skin by the hearth, he looked about him and, nodding approvingly, drew a long sigh of satisfaction.

"At last my dream has come true. This is the tableau I have so often seen; and as you know, my mind is not given much to fancies. I thank the good saints who have allowed us three to come together: two comrades-in-arms, and the sister of both. Do you remember, Raimbaut, how I told you long ago in Toulouse, that if we were to be brothers, my sister must be yours also?"

"I remember it well. Yet in this plan the Lady Biatritz had no part. Even now she may not accept me."

Although Raimbaut tried to speak carelessly, Biatritz did not fail to notice the earnestness in his voice; her face was very sympathetic as she turned to him and said, —

" When Bonifaz told me he had chosen you for his brother-in-arms, I felt at first a sharp pang of jealousy; then I accepted you with all my heart. Like Bonifaz, I have often dreamed that we should some day be together, as we are this afternoon. One thing only has my brother refused to tell me, and that is the reason for your estrangement. Over this I have shed many a sad tear."

" Indeed," exclaimed Raimbaut, " he is always generous. He was silent because he wished to shield me. The fault was mine alone."

" I am not so sure of that as I once was," declared Bonifaz. " Let us forget it altogether, now we are friends again. Tell me something of yourself. I learned about your triumph at Le Puy, and I can see the little Sparrow-Hawk of gold hanging from your neck. There are many who envy you its possession. I knew that you became the favorite troubadour of Provence, and that all Languedoc was at your feet. But it is your real self I would have you talk about. Do you still believe in the Perfect Love? Have you found it? "

Although Bonifaz asked the question, it was to Biatritz Raimbaut turned, with something of the reverence of the confessional.

"I still wear my severed mantle, though, as you see, only a small fragment has been cut from it. I have never been willing to renounce my vow, yet I confess it has often rested lightly upon me. In Perfect Love I have never ceased to trust, even when my faith

grew faint. I dare not say that I have found it; yet there is in my heart the glimmer of a great hope."

As Raimbaut spoke, he looked into the beautiful eyes which were turned upon him, and when he ended, there was a touch of color on Biatritz' cheek.

"That is good news, indeed," declared Bonifaz. "It pleases us when those we best love keep to their ideals. I feared you might be spoiled by flattery, for rumor said that every chatelaine and demoiselle in Languedoc was jealous of your favor, and that some were threatening to don armor and settle their rival claims in the lists!"

"Though my success exceeded my merits," replied Raimbaut, a little uncomfortably, "the truth was multiplied a thousand-fold. There are always women whose light heads are turned by the song of a troubadour. Yet I have met many serious chatelaines devoted to the art alone, from whom I have received inspiration. Had I been spoiled by adulation in Provence, my pride would have been quickly cured by the good people of Italy. They clipped my wings relentlessly!"

At this Bonifaz' laughter was full of sympathy.

"I know," he said, "in the south they understand the principles of the Gay Science not at all. Only we of the north comprehend that a troubadour may sing a lady's praise and love her with a pure devotion. There is something in the Italian spirit which is at the same time less ethereal and more intense than that which possesses your 'land of the wind and sun.'

Our barons are less prodigal in their gifts, and our ladies less lavish with their favors. Yet I must tell you our friendship is lasting, and our love less variable. I believe you are more likely to find here in Italy the Perfect Love which you seek, than among the ladies of Provence."

"I have no reason to complain of my treatment, Bonifaz, for I was an alien; and at the beginning I had not a dozen words of your tongue at my command. What wonder is it that they looked upon me with suspicion? Who can blame them that they cared not for my song? But now that I have learned to speak your language here in the north, I have been well received and have made many friends."

"I am sure of it," replied Bonifaz. "Should you go to Rome or Florence again, you would meet with different fortunes."

"But he must make no plans to leave us," declared Biatritz cordially. "There are many ladies scattered through the country between Milan and Turin who are greatly interested in the Gay Science; they will be glad to come to Pomaro when they learn that you are at the Castle. I am eager to hear your voice, which Bonifaz declares is beyond compare. You shall never lack me for a listener, wanting a better."

Raimbaut bowed.

"I wish no larger audience, and could hope for no greater inspiration for my song. Yet I fear that my singing will disappoint you. There is no disadvantage like the over-generous praise of a friend! My

good Bonifaz, why did you load me with this burden? Now tell me something of yourself, for you must both be weary of my affairs. I know you are famous as a knight and a leader in arms. Indeed, I hesitated to come to you this morning, fearing you had forgotten our old friendship in Toulouse."

"The Monferrata forget neither friend nor foe. I must tell you that, caring not to lose the attachment of my companions at Toulouse, I paid them a visit, from which I have but a little while returned."

"Tell me about them all," cried Raimbaut eagerly.

"There were slight changes at the court. Count Raimon carries his years lightly, and Bernart has found the secret of perpetual youth. He sang for me with a voice almost as resonant as when first I listened to him. I missed the fair Alazais: the palace seemed strangely vacant and empty without her. But I did not forget to visit her at Beziers. In Arnaut she has an ideal troubadour, whose devotion knows no bounds; yet I judged from her blush when she inquired about you, that she has not quite lost her old fondness."

At this Raimbaut, in spite of his experience, could not conceal a tinge of embarrassment. He changed the subject by asking, —

"What learned you of Miraval, and Folquet, and Guilhem?"

"They had all left the court," answered Bonifaz. "Miraval was breaking hearts and singing pretty

songs in every hospitable castle. Folquet is now a rival of Peire Vidal in the good graces of the Countess of Marseille. Have you heard of Peire's latest adventure?"

"Not a word has come to me since I took ship at Marseille."

"Our little friend with the pointed beard was wandering to and fro through the Camargue, like a butterfly among the flowers. At last he settled down at Saint Gilles, where, for a time, he forgot his old love and sang the praises of a fair lady who smiled upon him. Either she was too lavish with her favors, or they were multiplied in the telling. Peire so far forgot himself as to boast of his conquest and of the tokens of love which he had received. Unfortunately his words were repeated to the lady's husband. He would not, like Count Barral, accept Peire as a joke. The angry knight seized the little gallant and slit his tongue, swearing that the foolish braggart should be silent, for a time at least."

"It was indeed a sharp lesson!" exclaimed Biatritz. "I am sorry for the poor fellow."

"Yet he richly deserved his punishment," declared Raimbaut, "and there are others, knights as well as troubadours, who should suffer for their indiscretions. You have forgotten Guilhem. Is he still at Toulouse?"

"Even he had departed. They say he is attached to the chatelaine of Roussillon, whose husband watches her ever with a jealous eye."

"May the saints keep our little lad from all harm!" exclaimed Raimbaut. "He was always as merry as a May morning. And now I must remind you that not a single word have you told me about yourself, of whom I care most to learn."

"Well, that is a short story, with naught of interest. When I reached Piedmont, I found we had a feud with the city of Vercelli, and I was obliged to use my sword as a key to enter the gate of my father's castle. I married the Lady Eleanora, the daughter of a neighboring baron. She is a dear good wife, and devoted to my boy, whom I keep safely housed with her at Casale. As you know, my father took the Cross; not long ago my brother Conrad followed him; and I alone am left in charge of the family affairs. My sister Biatritz makes her home in this Castle of the Vale, to which I flee as often as I am able. Here I drop affairs of state; and here I come to rest. Now that I have you with me, I am as contented as is possible for a man whose one great desire is unfulfilled."

"Tell me," asked Raimbaut, "do you still wish to take the Cross?"

"I shall never be at peace," replied Bonifaz, "till I wear the holy emblem on my breast. Do you know the story of the brothers of Saint Bernart of Clairvaux?"

"I do not think I have heard it."

"The parchment declares that Bernart, on fire with heavenly desires, induced his haughty brothers, one after another, to forsake the world, until only

Nivard, the youngest, was left in his father's house. The oldest brother, Guido, watching him at play and thinking sadly of a family almost extinct, bade him remember that he was now sole heir to their ancestral lands. 'Heaven for you, and earth for me!' cried Nivard. 'Ah, that is not a fair division!' And a little later he, too, followed his brothers' example. Raimbaut, I have been left, like young Nivard, to look after the temporal affairs of Monferrat; but I promise you I am not satisfied with my task, and I shall not linger here for ever."

"And yet," said Biatritz sadly, and a little reproachfully, "you forget it is the women who suffer most. It is easy for a Crusader knight to don his armor, and ride away with his comrades at the sound of the trumpet, supported by the prayers of Holy Church. It is true he may die under the scorching sun of Palestine, and leave his bones to bleach on the desert. If he come not home again, Heaven is his portion; meanwhile he has the joy of battle and the hazard of arms to tempt him. While he is away, wife and sister must sit at home waiting for the message that is long coming, hoping for it, yet fearing it may bring words of disaster or death. If the knight comes not back, there are the long years of desolation for those who love him. Think of day after day spent in bending over useless tapestry, or weeping before a crucifix! One brother have I given to die for the cause of Christ. Another has left me at the call of the Cross; and I have not seen my

father's face for weary months. Bonifaz alone remains and he is eager to be away! Nothing would I deny Heaven, yet is it too much to ask that my last brother shall stay by my side?"

When Biatritz finished, she turned to the tapestry to conceal her emotion in the task before her. Bonifaz sprang to his feet.

"Only the call of the Cross could tempt me from your side," he said, bending over her with tenderness. "Only the love of Christ is greater than that I bear for you and Eleanora. I shall never leave you unless I feel my hope of Heaven is at stake."

All this opened a new world to Raimbaut as he watched and listened from the low couch. He had known something of the same spirit of renunciation when he had made his vow to follow in the footsteps of Saint Martin. His stay at Toulouse had done much to eradicate his early impressions, and his experience since he had become a troubadour had often taught him to look lightly upon the serious things of life. He had at all times been better than his surroundings, more earnest than those with whom he lived, yet never had he found himself in touch with a supernatural devotion like this. He felt how far it was above him, and there came into his heart a sudden desire for good, which was startling in its intensity. As he watched the brother and sister, forgetful of his presence under the influence of their deep feeling, he determined that he would try to find the secret of the spirit that inspired them.

" I must tell you," said Bonifaz, " that this sister of mine so loves me, unworthy, that she is jealous of everything that takes my heart from her. I confess I am not all unlike her, for when Messire Guilhem rode into the courtyard with his handsome face and brave apparel, announcing himself a suitor for her hand, I could scarce restrain my resentment. Even now, I cannot reconcile myself to their betrothal, although I well know it is my father's wish, and that the alliance is in every way a proper one."

As Bonifaz spoke, Biatritz' long lashes had rested on her cheek, but when he finished, she turned her brown eyes full upon him.

" Dearest brother, I had your promise long ago that you would be my ally, whenever the time came that a husband should be chosen for me. Messire Guilhem seems a worthy knight; I have said neither yea nor nay, even in my own mind. Yet you must remember that I have your promise."

" I' faith," declared Bonifaz heartily, " I believe I should hate the archangel Gabriel did he come to ask for you! It is at a time like this that I feel most deeply the loss of our mother. To me she is only a faint memory, but to you has been denied even that."

" And yet," said Biatritz, " my good old nurse has told me so much about her that I can picture her plainly. Have you told Messire Raimbaut of our discovery concerning the miniature in the Book of Hours? "

"I have not thought of it until this moment," replied Bonifaz, "but you shall tell the story, who can do it best."

"You must know," began Biatritz, looking up from her tapestry to find Raimbaut's eyes intently fixed upon her, —"you must know that although I have almost reached my eighteenth year, Vanna, my old nurse, treats me as if I were a child. Every night she tells me a tale before I go to sleep, and oftenest it is about my mother, whose nurse she also was, and for whose death she still mourns. When my mother was a demoiselle scarce of an age to marry, there came to Piedmont a knight of Provence. Young was he, handsome, and débonair. He wore rich raiment, he spoke with a honeyed tongue, and, most wonderful of all, he sang such songs as never had been heard in Italy. For each lady he had new verses, praising her beauty and extolling her virtue. One only would not listen to him. Piqued at his repulse, the wandering gallant swore to win the irresponsive maiden. His aubado woke her from her morning dreams. All day he followed like her dog. The last sound she heard at night was his viol under her window. At first she was flattered, for every woman envied her; but she soon wearied, for already she had given her heart to a young Count of Piedmont. This man was brave and comely, but rude withal, and he had not a single note in his throat. Indeed, he could scarce speak at all to her, so diffident was he. Yet at last he found courage to ask the demoiselle to marry

him; and so they were betrothed. Even then the troubadour did not quite give up hope, but waited about until the priest had firmly wedded them, before he mounted his horse and rode back to Provence. Now I must tell you that this disappointed suitor was an artist also, and had great skill with colors. That he might be often with the lady of his love, he had chosen to paint her portrait. Many were the hours he spent with her, looking on her beautiful face and graceful figure, and reproducing them devotedly upon the canvas. He had scarce finished the portrait by the wedding-day; and when he rode away, silent and melancholy, it was all he left behind him. It has hung in the alcove there for many years. If you care to see it, Bonifaz will help you to rise."

Leaning on his friend's shoulder, Raimbaut walked slowly across the room, and gave an exclamation of wonder as he saw upon the wall the very double of the Saint Love in the Book of Hours; yet it was no more like the miniature than Biatritz herself, who stood by his side.

"Yes," said Bonifaz, "the gallant troubadour who came to Piedmont was the Count of Courthézon. It was none other than my mother whom he loved, and placed upon the parchment of the Book of Hours, long after she was dead. Did you ever discover why the Count was so interested in you?"

"I have not the slightest knowledge," replied Raimbaut. "Often have I wished to learn the secret hidden in the Book. To-day, with my spurs

rightly won, it would be my privilege to touch the spring, and read the parchment concealed under the ivory plaque. It is for this purpose that I have pursued Berguedan, and must follow him until I wrest the stolen treasure from his evil clutches."

CHAPTER XXX

THE ARBOR OF DREAMS

RAIMBAUT slept that night as he had not slept since he left his room in the little tower at Vacqueiras. During his long months of wandering, he had occasionally enjoyed the comfort of a bed in a friendly castle, but often it had been only a truss of straw by the fireside, or a foul room in a crowded inn. Again and again he had found the door closed against him, and had been forced to sleep under the open sky. This was no hardship in fair weather. He had come to appreciate the calm joy of a night's rest with the turf for a couch, and the pines waving their fragrant plumes over his head. He had also known what it was to lie for weary hours on the sodden ground with the rain beating pitilessly upon him, and he had once nearly lost his life as he slept in midwinter among the high crags of the Apennines. No matter how he might please with his songs, he had been at best a stranger and an alien. Only here, at the Castle of the Vale, had he felt that he was sheltered by the walls of love and friendship. All night long pleasant voices were whispering in his ears, Saint Love was hovering over him, or Biatritz, no less fair, was smiling into his face.

He was wakened by the ringing of a church bell. It was not the measured tolling for daily Mass, but

joyful peals, every note of which spoke of gladness and triumph. It was none other than the blessed Easter morning, and when Raimbaut rose and looked out of the window, it seemed to him that the joy of the Resurrection was filling his heart.

Beneath him were the tree-tops, and gazing out over the branches, he could see the level plain like the garden of Paradise, with its groves of mulberry, and winding brooks. Beyond were the blue waters of the Po, fringed with yellow sand; and far to the north loomed the white summits of the mountains, faint and misty in the distance. As he stood with the fresh breeze on his brow, and with the odors of garden and forest in his nostrils, he wondered if Heaven itself could be more sweet.

Yes, every note of the church bell was answered by an echo in his soul. This was the first real Easter he had known for many years. His estrangement from Bonifaz had been like a burden of sin, how heavy he had not realized till it had been taken from him. As he thought over his experience of yesterday, his fierce struggle with the men of Vercelli, his knighthood, and above all the awakening in his heart, it seemed a dream too rapturous to bear the morning light. He was interrupted in his meditations by the entrance of Bonifaz, whose "Christ is risen!" was in itself a benediction, so full was it of goodwill.

"Christ is risen indeed!" replied Raimbaut, embracing his friend.

"Biatritz bade me bring to you this white lily with

her greeting. Since the first gleam of light, she has been placing blossoms about the altars, and strewing rushes in the aisles. Tell me, how is your thigh? Are you able to walk, or shall I summon the men-at-arms?"

"I am quite restored," replied Raimbaut, looking upon the lily as reverently as if it were a sacred relic.

"And Jacques has no sad reminder of yesterday save a lump on the top of his head, over which he is as merry as if it belonged to his enemy. He is the same jolly toothless lad who had a smile for everybody when we were all together at the court of Toulouse."

"Yes, often when Fate seemed most unkind, it was Jacques who gave me courage. He is the only real friend I have seen since I left Provence, until I reached this blessed spot."

Now the bells began again, and Bonifaz declared it most unlucky to be late to Mass on Easter morning. So they hurried down the stairway, across the court-yard, and entered the low porch of the church. Little it was, but beautiful in every line. Many generations of the race of Monferrat had endowed it liberally and gone to sleep on its breast. There were famous pictures on the walls, and through the stained-glass windows streamed splendid colors to hint of Heaven. The air was heavy with the odor of rare incense and the breath of fragrant flowers.

Raimbaut followed Bonifaz, stepping carefully between the groups of kneeling figures, until they came to an open space at the left of the high altar. Here

they found Biatritz on her knees, so engrossed by her devotion that she did not notice them as they took their places by her side. The candles were lit; the priests and the servers filed in slowly. Raimbaut bowed his head and prayed as he had never done since he left that other little sanctuary of God at Vacqueiras.

" Resurrexi, et adhuc tecum sum, Alleluia! " rose the opening chant. It seemed the very language of Heaven. Humbly he followed the solemn words, " Lord, Thou hast proved me, and known me." Not with the lips only did he pray, " Prosper our vows by Thy grace, which Thou dost anticipate by Thine inspiration." As he listened to the story of the Resurrection morning, how the stone was rolled back from the sepulchre, it seemed to him that a great stone was rolled away from the door of his heart. At the Sanctus bell, he began to realize with sorrow how unfaithful he had been, and bowing down a long while, once again he took upon himself the oath, almost forgotten, to follow in the footsteps of Saint Martin, and live a life of purity and love toward all the world. So near was he to Biatritz that the benediction of her presence possessed him more and more. On the steps there were spread anemones as they had dropped from her hand, but though the dew-drops still glistened on their petals, they were no purer than her face. The long lashes rested on a cheek almost too pale for earthly beauty, until the sunbeams sent a tinge of rosy light upon it.

Raimbaut's adoration was for Biatritz, the personification of the womanhood of which he had dreamed since a little lad in the dark tower of Vacqueiras. But he looked beyond her through the stained-glass window up to the blue sky and into Heaven itself. The doubts which had hung over him so long were exorcised like evil spirits, and there came to him a great peace on that Easter day.

With the glad notes of the organ sounding in their ears, the worshippers emerged from the shadows into the bright sunlight of the fresh morning. Bonifaz sought the stables. Biatritz led the way across the square, passed through the castle entrance, and turning to the right, came to a door which opened by a secret spring at the touch of her hand.

As the door closed behind them, Raimbaut found himself in a sheltered garden. All around him were blossoming flowers. The lily beds showed sad and vacant, the glory of their fruitage being taken from them to deck the little church. One dense clump only remained to fill the air with fragrance. By this Biatritz lingered for a moment, bending lovingly over it, and then entered an arbor which was covered with the dark green leaves and pink petals of climbing roses. Here she took a low seat, where she could look over the trees and the fertile valley to the distant mountains, and motioned Raimbaut to a place by her side. The air was so clear that they could see Monte Rosa showing white on the horizon.

For a long time neither spoke. Raimbaut was

afraid to break the spell, and Biatritz was possessed by thoughts which she could not express. At last she looked up into his face, —

"This is my own garden, which I have been selfish enough to keep to myself. Only Bonifaz has entered it. Here have I dreamed my dreams since I was a little child. Here I come when I find myself in doubt or trouble. I wonder why I have brought you to it?"

"I cannot tell," replied Raimbaut. "I have no right save from your graciousness."

"I call this my Arbor of Dreams, though truly I give not all my time to visions. Here I bring my books and study the lives of the saints and the deeds of heroes. Which loved you best to read about when you were a little lad?"

"At Vacqueiras I had no choice, for we had but two poor manuscripts. One was roughly penned and scarcely legible, yet it told the story of Jaufre Rudel. I read it over and over, until every word was plainer in my mind than the dim characters on the parchment."

"Ah!" Biatritz added, quite unconscious of the sting behind her words, "I wonder that you cared to read so much about a man who was only a singer and who performed no deeds of valor! I had many books from which to choose. Oftenest I read of Sir Galahad, and the vision of the Holy Grail, with its rose-red light, tinting the white walls of his cell. To the very end of his quest I followed breathless. Bonifaz admired Lancelot. Alas! though he was brave and

strong, his heart was not clean, and he saw not the glory of the sacred chalice. I also loved the tale of Oberon the dwarf, and Huon of Bordeaux. Often I would read the story of Roland, and weep over his death. When I grew older, my fancy turned to the struggles for the Cross; then Godefroi of Bouillon was my hero."

"Were all your thoughts of knights?" inquired Raimbaut. "Did you never think of a troubadour who should sing your praises, as did Rudel for his Princess Far-Away?"

"No," replied Biatritz, "I have never dreamed of singers. I have always thought of you in armor as you fought with Berguedan in the lists. I knew you the moment you slid from your horse yesterday to take the place of poor Renato, — may God rest his soul! I broke the news myself to Nonna, who was heartbroken at her husband's death. For fifty years they had lived together. In vain I tried to comfort her. I could hear her sobbing by the Rood this morning. Alas, it is a sad Easter for her!"

"Truly," declared Raimbaut, "he was braver than I; yet to me was given all the glory. To-day I breathe the blessed air and feel the warm sunlight, while he is lying cold and stark."

"And far too little praise was given you," exclaimed Biatritz. "I have seen many a tournament and more than one fierce contest of arms, yet truly have I never set eyes upon a knight so skilful with the sword. Bonifaz tells me he could not have held

the shrine against the men of Vercelli. How is it that you have so long delayed the consecration of your blade to the cause of Christ? After all, it was but for a useless demoiselle you fought, while you might have been striking lusty blows in defence of the Cross itself."

"No demoiselle is useless," replied Raimbaut, "who can inspire to noble thoughts as you have done to-day. I confess that my mind has been too much bent upon the petty things of life, though never have I realized it until now. Should the Call of the Cross ever come to me, I promise it shall not fall on heedless ears."

So they spent the morning together, each speaking innermost thoughts freely, each contented with the long silences which intervened. Raimbaut forgot to use the pretty compliments and meaningless flatteries which he had learned in his travels. He became simple and sincere in the presence of a being whose every thought was truth.

When the sun had climbed above their heads, they rose reluctantly, and Raimbaut said, —

"There is some magic in this arbor, which quickens even me to dreams of worthiness."

"Then you shall come to it whenever you will. You shall look from my garden to the distant mountains and find peace and content."

CHAPTER XXXI

SONGS TO BIATRITZ

So happy was Raimbaut that he postponed his departure again and again, until he no longer planned to leave the Castle of the Vale. Berguedan was almost forgotten, though the thought of the sinister Spaniard was always like a dark cloud hanging on the horizon of his memory.

Many guests came to the Castle. The days were spent in hunting and falconry, and the evenings, when all had gathered in the great hall, were given over to songs and story-telling. Here Raimbaut was a prince indeed. He had so far perfected himself in his art that he had become a troubadour beyond compare. His voice was a mellow instrument with which he could interpret every emotion, every passion. He had an infinite number of songs from which to choose, and in the sympathetic atmosphere of Monferrat he composed many new ones. He sang the chansons which he had written in praise of Alazais, of Loba, and of other fair ladies by whom he had been given audience. He was always careful to call no one by name and to give no clue to the object of his song. So successful was he that visitors came from a distance to hear him, and all Piedmont and Lombardy rang with his triumphs.

Before long he began to sing of one who, he declared,

surpassed all others. She was tall, and dark, and slender. Reserved was she, and dreamy; she smiled not often, and never gave way to thoughtless merriment; her eyes were brown, and her hair like the shadow of dusk. This lady was so far above him that he had no hope to win anything but her sympathy and the right to be called her troubadour.

One midsummer afternoon found Biatritz in the little arbor looking out over the plain which had retained something of the fresh green of springtime, thanks to the kind waters of the Po. Over her head were masses of color, for the roses were in full bloom, and the air was rich with their fragrance. She sat with her hands folded listlessly in her lap. She had neither book nor embroidery, and her dreamy eyes were turned to Monte Rosa, showing faint and misty against the azure sky. She did not look up when there came the sound of approaching footsteps, nor even when Raimbaut came to the entrance and stood before her.

For a long time the troubadour gazed into the beautiful face without speaking. He was loath to disturb her dreams, doubtful of the result of what he was about to say. His voice trembled a little in spite of all his strength of will.

"My Lady Biatritz, I have come to ask your counsel. Will you give it to me?"

"I will gladly help you if it be in my power."

"I worship one who is far above me, so beautiful, so noble, and so good, that I dare not speak to her.

Tell me, shall I conceal my thoughts and die, or shall I reveal my heart to her, hoping against hope that she will have mercy and grant me her favor? Counsel me — in the name of God!"

Biatritz flushed and then grew pale. When she spoke, her voice was very low and calm: —

"Surely it is right to declare one's self, rather than to die! A sincere worshipper should not hesitate to speak to his lady and beg to be accepted as a servitor and friend. I am sure, if she be wise and courtly, she will not take it amiss, nor think it a dishonor, but will esteem him the more. I counsel you to declare your heart to that lady whom you love, and to pray her to look upon you with favor. There is no woman in the world who would scorn you for her knight and troubadour."

As she finished, Biatritz lifted her eyes to his, and at her glance Raimbaut threw himself on his knees.

"My Lady Biatritz, right well you know it is none other than yourself who are the lady of my praise. None other will I ever sing. Unless you accept my devotion, I care not to live."

For a moment she looked on Raimbaut, whose head was bowed and whose eyes were fixed upon the ground. Again her face alternately flushed and paled.

"Messire Raimbaut, since I was a child, I have known of you. You are my brother's friend and comrade-in-arms. I told no more than truth when I said that you were such as no lady in the world would

scorn. I accept you as my knight and troubadour. I am glad to be your friend and your Lady of Praise. I bid you strive to excel in word and worth."

She held to him her hand, and Raimbaut touched his lips to the white fingers as if she were a saint indeed. After a pause, she said, —

"You have told me that you have experienced only little loves, light passions, passing fancies. You declare you will never again sing of any other than myself, yet you have praised many gracious chatelaines and fair demoiselles, as becomes a gallant troubadour. Do you remember your first song in praise of a fair lady?"

"It was scarce a song at all," replied Raimbaut. "When I arrived at Toulouse, footsore and weary after my tramp from Vacqueiras, I pleased Count Raimon with my singing, and Bernart begged that I be taken into the palace as a squire. The Count of Polignac, who did not love me, suggested that I be tested, and the Lady Ermengarda gave me as a task fourteen lines to write. I succeeded by a miracle, helped by the favor of the Countess Bellisenda and the fair Alazais. The latter had been wondrous kind to me at Beaucaire, and 'My lady's flower-like face' was writen in praise of her. I copied the words on a piece of parchment and scarce touched my lute as I spoke them. Sometimes I am traitor to my art, and think the deepest feeling cannot be expressed by trifling notes which wander here and there."

"Indeed," declared Biatritz thoughtfully, "I am

sure that strong emotion is always badly wedded when it is joined to shallow song. Your first task shall be to write fourteen lines to me. You shall pen them on a fair piece of parchment, and recite them in this arbor."

"I will do my best," replied Raimbaut, "yet will it be a hard task to confine my praise of you to such a narrow space."

That very evening in the crowded hall, he sang of Biatritz so plainly that there was little doubt of his meaning. At this there was great disappointment, and not a few fair ladies of Piedmont claimed that Raimbaut should have chosen a chatelaine of more experience. Many declared that it was contrary to the very spirit of the Gay Science for a troubadour to take a young demoiselle for his Lady of Song. Even Bonifaz looked troubled when he learned the truth.

The news passed from lip to lip until it became known in every castle of Provence and Languedoc. When it reached Beziers, Alazais listened discontentedly to the songs of Arnaut. She had hoped that some day Raimbaut might remember his first love.

Ermengarda rejoiced openly and declared, —

"Now we shall hear songs such as he has never sung before."

Count Raimon congratulated him in a message written by Bernart, to which the old troubadour added, —

"You can never go wrong, if you follow your heart."

It was not long before the songs of Raimbaut in praise of Biatritz became so famous that no joglar could be sure of a welcome unless he could sing them. Indeed, there was a furor over his " Carros " such as no song had called forth since Bernart's " Whene'er the lark's glad wing I see! "

Yet it was not the chanson sung before guest and stranger which pleased Biatritz most. Again and again she received from Raimbaut bits of parchment on which were traced fourteen lines in which he had jewelled her praise.

" Brown as the summer twilight are your eyes,
Soft as the shadowy dusk, when night is near,
And one by one the hermit stars appear
To bless the blackness of the lonely skies.
Your glance is like the West, where passion dies
And only prayer is left, prayer and the dear
Dream of a Perfect Love. I seem to hear —
When in your eyes I look — the sound arise

" Of distant bells tolling the Angelus,
The sound of bells blown by a fragrant breeze.
It is the holy hour when on his knees
The pale monk falls to worship; even thus
My soul would bow, when in your eyes I see
God's star of love that lights eternity."

This was given her one evening after supper, and she took it to her room, where she read it over and over. In spite of its intensity there was not the least hint of passion. It seemed to her to be the perfect expression of devotion.

Then sonnet followed sonnet, each one ornamented

more elaborately than its predecessor. Beginning with little flourishes, as if the pen were carried away by a vagrant wind of fancy, there appeared floriated initial letters; then came a decorated border with colors red and blue, and finally, the manuscript was illuminated with flecks of gold like a missal, for Raimbaut had acquired the scribe's fine art in the course of his wanderings.

Biatritz kept the parchments in a Venetian casket, and gloated over them as a miser over his riches. There was one beginning, —

> " Only her eyes are mine, only her eyes! "

There was another, —

> "If I should say, Sweetheart, there is no king
> But Love, the absolute; there is no throne
> But that on which he sits";

and a more precious sonnet yet, —

> "Slow as a queen she moves, and for a crown
> Her wreath of hair is black as Juno's frown,
> And fragrant as a rose of Paradise."

So the days and the weeks went by, till one night Biatritz took a new sonnet to her chamber. When she read it the first time, her face flushed with happiness. Again and again he had praised the glory of her hair, but now he had written of nothing else.

> "Her hair is like a shadow of the night
> In some enchanted forest, which no track
> May traverse, and where not a branch doth lack
> Its happy spirit whispering of delight.

The sun can make no change: however bright
He shineth on her tresses, they give back
No swiftly answering gleam, but doubly black
They show above her forehead's dream of white.

"And so I treasure them. I know how sweet
The flowers are that blossom in the shade,
How strong the love that is not easy made,
But blooms in spite of all the clouds that greet.
Yet, O my love! what dangers would I dare
To reach the shadow of thy loosened hair!"

It was only when she read the sonnet a second time that she discovered herself repeating the last lines over and over again, —

"Yet, O my love! what dangers would I dare
To reach the shadow of thy loosened hair!"

What was there about these words that left a taste half-delicious, half-bitter? She found herself lingering over them, until there came into her heart a feeling which for the moment she did not try to restrain. Then the blood rushed into her face, she covered her hot cheeks with her hand, and turning to her embroidery frame, busied herself with the bright worsteds.

The next verses contained no touch of passion. As she read them carefully, she could not find the least word at which to take offence. At this she was relieved, for she feared lest Raimbaut should try to cross the invisible barrier she had raised.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE ROBE OF BONIFAZ

Bonifaz had gathered about him a little clump of spears with which he galloped about the country. They were young men, ready to follow their leader in any deed of daring. Occasionally they joined the retainers of Monferrat, and fought against the men of Vercelli. More often, however, their errand was to right some injustice or to punish an oppressor of the weak. So well was it known that Bonifaz of Monferrat was open to any just appeal, that scarcely a week passed without some demand upon him. He chose his followers to suit his errand; sometimes riding with his squires only, sometimes taking a considerable body of men. On these forays Raimbaut was often his sole companion, and, as comrades-in-arms, their lives were full of adventure.

It was early summer when Aimonet, an old joglar, brought news that Jacobina, heiress of the earldom of Ventimiglia, was persecuted by her uncle, who had planned to carry her off to Sardinia and marry her there against her will. The news came at supper-time. Aimonet was barely able to tell his story, having abandoned his foundered horse at the foot of the hill.

Bonifaz left his dish of roast peacock steaming on the table, commanding Raimbaut and his five squires

to arm hastily. They were away within the quarter-hour. Biatritz had bidden them a hurried farewell, and then climbed the stairs listlessly to the library, for she could not eat. Many times she had been deserted as suddenly, but never before had she felt so lonely and depressed. She wrought at her tapestry until she found herself absent-mindedly placing a star amid the green threads of the foliage. Then she betook herself to bed. For a long time she lay awake, praying that Bonifaz and Raimbaut might be preserved from danger and restored to her in safety. The dawn was brightening when at last she fell asleep.

Bonifaz had shouted as he disappeared through the gate, — " You may look for us within the week "; but seven weary days passed, and another seven. She told herself of a score of accidents which might have detained them, but as day followed day, she became possessed of a thousand fears. These presentiments were intensified by a brief visit from Eleanora, who was anxious for her husband's safety. She spent many hours on her knees in the little church, finding her only consolation in prayer.

A full month had passed when the cavalcade rode back again into the castle. The rain was pouring in torrents, so that Biatritz could not distinguish one rider from another as she peered eagerly out of the window. She counted them, however, with her fingers on her throat, and when she found the number was complete, she sank into her chair. In another moment Bonifaz held her in his arms. He told her

they had succeeded in their quest, but had been delayed by a misfortune to Raimbaut. He had received a wound, not serious in itself, which had left him very weak from loss of blood. He had been forbidden to put foot in stirrup for a fortnight, but he was quite out of danger and would soon regain his strength.

After two days in bed, Raimbaut appeared, pale and listless, and the late afternoon found him reclining on the green turf which fringed the Arbor of Dreams. His mantle was spread beneath him, and he looked up into the face of Biatritz, which was turned toward him full of sympathy and solicitude.

" If it will not weary you," she said, " tell me of your adventures. I promise not to interrupt with a single word. Alas! I have learned silence during the long days when I feared every hour might bring me a message of death."

" I would rather sit here in solitude, though never again do I expect to ride on a quest more merry or more venturesome. Early one morning we slackened rein at the gate of Genoa, only to learn that the Lady Jacobina had already passed by on the way to Pisa. Hastily changing horses, we reached Spezzia at noon, and, changing again, we came to Pisa just at nightfall. As we were about to enter we met a cavalcade, in the midst of which Bonifaz recognized Jacobina, although she was disguised. Following at a distance, we came to the port, where we discovered a ship just ready to sail.

" All this time the demoiselle made no outcry; but, just as she was about to be carried to the deck, she began to struggle and call loudly for help. At this moment we assailed her abductors so fiercely that they broke in disorder. I had no difficulty in lifting her to my saddle and riding away, followed by Bonifaz and the squires, no one of whom had received any serious hurt.

" For a little while it seemed as if the game was ours. The shouting on the water and the shore ceased. Then we heard the clatter of horse and foot pursuing us. We spurred through the darkness, and at midnight had made such speed that there was no sound except the wind in the trees and the ripple of the water on the shore close to which our path led. We then concealed ourselves in a dense forest and waited until the following evening. We believed we had thrown them off our tracks, when we saw before us, barring our way, so many knights with shining helmets and flying banners, that we again took refuge in the wooded hills between Alberga and Finar. There we lay hidden in a cave for two days; nothing had we either to eat or drink. We heard on all sides the cries of our enemies; but almost by a miracle escaped discovery.

" On the third day we left the cave, and, making a wide circuit, eluded the Pisans, but came instead upon a company of bandits. They held the pass of Belhestar, lurking to plunder the passers-by. We did not know what to do. Behind us were the Pisans,

not less than two-score knights and men-at-arms; and before us, guarding the pass, were a dozen brigands against whom we could only fight on foot, for there was not room to use our destriers.

"We decided finally we must go on. Leaving Bertaldon and Hugonet to guard Jacobina and to keep the horses, the rest of us drew our swords and attacked the robber bands so fiercely that we cleared the pass.

"We dined joyously on food left behind by the robbers, and at evening reached the castle of Baron Eyssi, whose eldest son had long loved the Lady Jacobina. Next morning we saw the lovers married. In the afternoon, assisted by the retainers of the good baron, we galloped on to Ventimiglia, where we found Jacobina's own castle so poorly guarded that we took it by storm.

"Here we waited two weary weeks before I was able to sit upright in the saddle, for I had received a wound at the pass of Belhestar which was reopened in the last struggle. They were very kind to me; but I never ceased to long for the Castle of the Vale. Truly it seemed the very heaven of my soul, which I must reach or die."

"There is but one Heaven," declared Biatritz, "by whose kindness you were preserved from death. Tell me, did you pray Saint Martin in your time of danger?"

"There was scarce time for a petition," answered Raimbaut, "so busy were we with our swords. But

my heart is now full of gratitude. Have I not made my gift to the Church? And, as you see, I have severed my mantle from collar to hem, as in the old days when I followed closely in the footsteps of my patron."

"It is a good sign," declared Biatritz. "I did not fail to notice it and my heart was gladdened. We can find peace only at the foot of the Cross."

Raimbaut listened reverently, feeling strangely languid, for he had overtaxed his strength. All unconsciously he began to nod, and his head sank upon the arm of the chair in which Biatritz sat. She, fearing that he might slip to the ground, and that the shock of the fall would reopen the wound, scarcely healed, gently moved and placed his head upon her knee.

The shadows were beginning to lengthen. She had passed so many sleepless nights that it was not long before she leaned back in her chair and slumbered peacefully.

It was thus Bonifaz found them. A crescent moon hung in the velvet sky, and shone upon Biatritz' face. On the soft turf lay Raimbaut, his head resting against her knee, her white fingers tangled in his hair. For a moment anger flamed into the cheek of Bonifaz. Then he understood, and for a long time he watched them as they slept. Finally he drew his robe from his shoulder, and stretched it over his sister and his friend. So he left them, the folds of his garment covering both.

When Raimbaut awoke and found his head pillowed on Biatritz' lap, his soul was filled with ecstasy. He saw that she still slumbered and rose cautiously that he might not disturb her. The robe fell to the ground. He discovered it was that of Bonifaz. The air was soft, and he realized that it was not for protection that the garment enveloped their sleeping forms. Plainer than words it told how Bonifaz trusted in the honor of his friend and comrade.

For a moment Raimbaut gazed on Biatritz, loath to leave her; then threw the robe over his arm and hurried from the garden. He crossed the courtyard, climbed the stairs, and hardly waited for an answer to his knock before he entered Bonifaz' room. His friend was seated at a table on which rested a scroll of parchment. He looked up, a smile upon his face, but Raimbaut was very serious as he said, —

" Here is your robe. I have never been false to you."

" I doubted you but for one instant," replied Bonifaz.

" I swear that you may always trust me to the uttermost."

" Indeed, my friend, to prove my confidence I will tell you something which concerns me deeply. I wish to ask your assistance."

" You may speak as if to your soul's confessor. I will make any sacrifice to help you."

" I must tell you," began Bonifaz, " that before

my father set out for Palestine it was agreed that the Count of Courthézon should marry Biatritz. Naught was said to her, for she was too young to be told of the alliance. Guilhem comes again to-morrow. I have before me a message from my father in which my duty is plainly stated. Biatritz is one who keeps the secret of her own heart, and I love her far too much to force her inclination. I hope Guilhem will succeed in winning her affections. If he fail, it will sadly disappoint my old father, who is battling for the glory of the Cross, for Guilhem has promised that on his wedding-day a huge sum of gold shall be given to help the cause of Christ."

"What, then, is to be my duty in the carrying out of this plan?"

"I have not failed to see," continued Bonifaz, "the strong friendship between Biatritz and yourself. I know she has great confidence in your judgment. Will you try to teach her to love the man whom she should marry?"

"God knows," replied Raimbaut, "I would give my right hand to help you in any project which is close to your heart. Believe me when I say it is not because Guilhem was unfriendly to me that I hesitate to assist you. Listen, Bonifaz: do you think your sister Biatritz will be happy as his wife?"

At this direct question Bonifaz was plainly troubled.

"I confess," said he at last, "that I do not love Guilhem, though I know nothing against him save

the sins of youthful blood. I dislike him most for his mocking disposition. But I believe that he sincerely loves Biatritz. There are a dozen young barons who are desirous of marrying her, yet, truly, I know not one I should prefer to Guilhem. If she takes not a positive dislike to him, I shall do all I can to bring this marriage to pass. A demoiselle of noble family cannot choose a man to her liking. I confess I had no passion for my Eleanora when I married her, yet I have come to love her most devotedly. Tell me, my friend, can I depend upon your help? "

He put his hand on Raimbaut's arm, but the latter drew away, and, walking to the window, stood for a long time looking out over the valley, seeing nothing. He told himself that if he were the Count of Courthézon, he could win the love of Biatritz, and his heart throbbed with a fierce resentment against hostile fate, which had made him a poor troubadour. But, when he came to himself, he decided quickly that it would be worse than useless to attempt to change Bonifaz' mind. It took but little longer to be certain that he could not grant his friend's request. When he thought of staying at Monferrat to watch the wooing, even the breeze from the pine trees was bitter in his nostrils. He turned to Bonifaz, who sat waiting patiently.

" Believe me, when I say I am sure that the Lady Biatritz is too spiritual to be happy as the wife of Guilhem. For this reason I cannot help him. I am afraid that if I stay with you I shall, in spite of my-

self, say something which will influence Biatritz against this marriage on which you have set your heart. It is best that I go away. I promised the Count of Savona long ago that I would spend a fortnight with him. I can take this opportunity for my visit, and, passing through Genoa, can see if any message has been sent me from Vacqueiras. I have had strange forebodings of late that all is not well with my father."

Bonifaz rose from his seat, and put both hands on his friend's shoulder.

" My good Raimbaut, I am sure your decision is an honest one; yet I will not have you leave me thus. With your promise not in any way to oppose the suit, I am content."

For a little Raimbaut hesitated; then he heard a light step on the stair and the rustle of silken garments and said, —

" I will stay with you."

CHAPTER XXXIII

ADORATION

THE next morning Raimbaut took his falcon and departed from the Castle as soon as Matins was over. He did not stop for breakfast, and found no appetite later for the food which he carried in his pouch. He wandered over the fields and through the woods, careless where he went; and not once did he loosen his hawk.

Mid-morning found him riding aimlessly toward Valenza. Suddenly his reverie was disturbed by the sound of an approaching cavalcade. There was the clatter of arms and trappings, the ripple of gay laughter, the echoes of a strong voice which broke every now and again into snatches of song. Next he saw splashes of color through the openings of the hedge, the flash of sunbeams on polished steel, and a score of horsemen came swinging around a curve in the road.

It was a brave array. The destriers were mettled, their housings were new, and the party cantered along as heedlessly as if the road led through Arcadia. The riders were clad in Genoese velvet, silks, satins, and brocades, showing all the colors of the rainbow. There had been a shower in the night, so that hardly a fleck of dust dimmed their effulgence. It was evident they rode on a peaceful errand, for only the men-at-arms who accompanied them wore any harness.

There was something in their gaiety which offended Raimbaut's troubled spirit like a personal affront. He rode moodily along without looking up, until some one cried out,—"Oho! Messire Raimbaut of Vacqueiras! Is this the way you pass your friends?" and Raimbaut found himself confronted by Guilhem. He was decked out as if for a wedding. From the plume which hung low as his shoulder, to his shoes of embossed leather, every article of his apparel was a marvel. His eyes were bright, his cheeks flushed, his countenance wreathed in smiles. Raimbaut, clad in sombre gray, felt that the contrast was more than physical, and, as he looked at Guilhem, there came to him a feeling of hopelessness. What chance had he, a poor troubadour, against this young noble?

"Whence come, and whither go you?" cried out Guilhem.

"I am hawking, as you see," replied Raimbaut.

"And faith, you have not killed a sparrow! Not a step further shall you go. You must ride back with me to the Castle. I am bound thither to present myself as a suitor for the hand of the fair Biatritz. You shall sing the praises of the most beautiful demoiselle in the wide world, and incidentally whisper to her some of the many virtues you know that I possess."

"I cannot go with you. I have an errand at Valenza which will not brook delay."

"Tell me of no errand! There can be nothing half so important as this affair of mine! I swear that even holy Jerusalem is of no consequence to-day

compared with the little village of Pomaro. Thither we make our pilgrimage. I will take no denial: you must go with me."

As Raimbaut looked at Guilhem and listened to his words, he could not fail to note how much in earnest he was, nor how the old mockery had disappeared before the strong purpose that had taken possession of him. He was forced to admit, in spite of himself, that Guilhem loved Biatritz deeply, and desired her sincerely. Indeed, it was only after repeated requests that Guilhem accepted Raimbaut's refusal as final. He then summoned a man-at-arms who carried a small cask of wine on his saddle, filled a silver goblet to the brim, and cried out, almost with a challenge in his voice, —

" I have made a vow that no one shall pass me this day who will not drink to the health of the fairest in all Christendom. So come, Messire Raimbaut! Empty this goblet to the honor of the peerless Lady of Monferrat! I swear you shall swallow the last drop."

Raimbaut took the goblet and drank the very dregs, whispering under his breath, —

" To Biatritz, my Biatritz! "

Then the gay cavalcade rode on, leaving him to his solitude. He had planned to wander the whole day in the fields, but noon found him returned to the castle, in spite of his determination. Everywhere were new faces and unfamiliar figures, and the rafters rang with merry words and jolly laughter. He felt

strangely lonely, as he stood in the doorway for a moment, quite unrecognized. He saw the seat which he had occupied ever since his arrival taken by another. He should have expected that the place of honor by the side of Biatritz would be given to her suitor, but his heart was very sore. Yet as he scrutinized Guilhem with a critical eye, his admiration almost overcame the dislike which possessed him. Handsome beyond all others in the room, the Count of Courthézon was the very model of a young gallant. His rich apparel showed the restraint of a studied refinement, and the jewels in his collar sparkled bravely. He was talking to Biatritz, who seemed greatly interested. "Out of sight, out of mind," muttered Raimbaut bitterly. But in another moment the seneschal discovered him, and with a beckoning finger showed him a vacant seat on the other side of Biatritz.

"Welcome home!" she said. "We missed you at breakfast, but naught could we learn until the Count of Courthézon reported he had met you. He tells me that he knew you long ago when you were a boy, and that he is eager to renew the acquaintance."

"Truly am I," Guilhem added, as he leaned forward and looked at Raimbaut. "Many years ago, ere I had learned either manners or morals, I was very rude to you, and was properly punished for my offence. I wish now to atone for my incivility, and am anxious to show that I have acquired courtesy with the years."

"Well spoken!" exclaimed Biatritz. "It pleases me to hear a man confess a wrong so fairly."

"My lord," replied Raimbaut, "when I came to Courthézon I was uncouth as any peasant lad from the hills. To sharpen the dull blade one must first use a rough stone. I received naught but what was good for me, and have only thanks for the interest Messire Guilhem then took in my education."

Although Guilhem spoke with every appearance of cordiality, and Raimbaut answered with seeming friendliness, there was something in the tones of their voices which caught the attention of Biatritz. In spite of her dreaminess, she was keenly susceptible to such impressions, and she looked wonderingly from one to the other. There was a question on her lips, but just at that moment Bonifaz rose, and, making a cordial speech in recognition of his guest, proposed a toast to the "gallant young knight who graces Pomaro with his presence."

When the toast was drunk, Guilhem replied with a perfection of speech and manner which won the admiration of every one. He stood, a handsome figure, between Bonifaz and Biatritz; and speaking Italian with scarce a hint of the Provençal accent, told of his appreciation of the hearty welcome he had received. His thoughts were not very deep, nor were his words very serious, but there was an air of the travelled man of the world, which made Bonifaz appear almost rude by comparison.

As he finished, the hall rang with applause, and

when he took his seat, he devoted himself most assiduously to Biatritz. She, not wishing to be discourteous, was forced to neglect Raimbaut, although she did not fail to turn to him whenever Guilhem allowed her the opportunity.

After the feast Raimbaut sang at the request of Bonifaz. Notwithstanding the Piedmontese had heard him many times, they insisted that he should sing again and again. He ended with the little song of the brook, written by Bernart; and as this was understood from long usage to be his final effort, there were cries for a song from Guilhem.

At this the Count of Courthézon rose to his feet and said, —

"Alas, my friends, Saint Cecily did not smile upon my birth. But had I the gift of melody, I should never dare sing after Messire Raimbaut had shown us the perfect fruitage of the troubadour's art."

Renewed applause broke forth at this very pretty compliment. As the two young men stood in full view of all the guests, first one and then another noticed the resemblance between them. Of the same height, Raimbaut was broader at the shoulder and more strongly knit. He had been browned by the sun, kissed by the wind, battered by the storm. The lines of his face showed the effects of his struggles with a world not always friendly.

Guilhem was fair and smooth, his hair carefully dressed; and he carried himself with a confidence quite foreign to Raimbaut's attitude of proud reserve.

Yet as they stood together that day in the great hall of the Castle of the Vale, they might easily have been brothers, so like were they.

When they had taken their seats, Jacques gave an exhibition of sleight-of-hand in which, by constant practice, he had become wonderfully clever and dexterous. The little joglar followed with his display of tumbling, but in this, alas, he showed himself less skilful. In spite of his boasted abstemiousness, the temptation of bowl and platter was oftentimes too great, and he had grown as plump as a rabbit. Besides this, his fall had stiffened the cords of one knee, so that he was unable now to perform many of those more exacting feats which had made him famous. But he still possessed the same irresistible smile, which was, after all, his most valuable treasure.

When dinner was over, Raimbaut sought his room and tried to drive away bitter thoughts by devoting himself to the completion of a sonnet over which he had labored long. The first lines had been written many weeks before: in fact, on the very night after he had seen Biatritz in the wayside shrine. The sestet had, so far, baffled him. The first part he had engrossed upon the parchment, surrounding the margin with a floriated border of red and green and gold.

This afternoon the elusive words came flocking to him. He penned them carefully and set the scroll in the sun to dry. The shadows were beginning to lengthen when he decided to go to Biatritz. He could not hope to find her in the arbor, so he sought

her in the audience-chamber, carrying the parchment in the pocket of his tunic. He discovered her bending over the embroidery-frame. She looked up, greeted him with a smile, and said, —

"Alas! The duty I owed a guest newly arrived, made me seem discourteous to you at dinner. He is a very attractive man and has kept us interested all the afternoon with his tales of travel; but I left him at last, hoping to have a placid hour with an old friend."

"You were very good to think of me," replied Raimbaut. "I fear your kindness will be ill paid, for I feel neither wise nor merry to-day."

"Then we can both be quiet: it is the supreme test of friendship when there is no sense of vacancy in long silences. Do you know, I was wishing you had written something more to read to me! You must not spend so much labor on the coloring that the words are delayed. They, after all, are what I enjoy the most."

She was kinder even than her wont, plainly trying to console Raimbaut for his disappointment, and he loved her with a devotion which filled his soul with rapture. His eyes were very eloquent.

"I have a sonnet finished within the hour, which I have done my very best to make beautiful on the parchment. I call it 'Adoration.'"

"Let me hear it," commanded Biatritz, looking at him a little wonderingly.

He took up his lute, and Biatritz listened as he

half-spoke, half-sang the words, accompanying himself with notes so faint that they but hinted of a melody wafted from distant fields: —

"I look upon thee as a worshipper
Up to his saint, in some high alcove placed;
A distant saint, white-robed, and tranquil-faced,
Whom only patient prayer may hope to stir.
Content am I to be thy chorister,
To sing thy constant praises, self-effaced;
I think of thee as one to be embraced
By holy hands alone, that cannot err."

He repeated the octave as if he were upon his knees in prayer. Then he struck a strange chord, and in a voice, every accent of which was changed, he almost whispered, —

"Yet sometimes to my heart there cometh dreams
Of full possession, and I see the saint
No longer, but the woman, passion-faint;
The woman, through whose veins the warm blood streams, —
O sweet earth-love! I then would lose the bliss
Of many heavens for a single kiss."

When he finished, Biatritz sprang to her feet with an inarticulate cry. She looked at Raimbaut as if she would read his very soul. Then a wave of color rushed into her cheeks. She turned from him and hurried swiftly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SWEET EARTH LOVE

For a long time Raimbaut was too stunned to think, or even to suffer. He found himself in his own room, though he knew not how he came there. He could not understand how he had offended. There was something wrong with the sonnet. What could it be? He repeated it carefully until he came to the final lines and their full meaning dawned upon him. They were flooded with passion such as a troubadour had no right to express. It was no less pure than the adoration with which he had gazed upon Biatritz when he saw her in the niche of the roadside shrine; yet he could not deceive himself with the thought that it was no more exacting, no more dangerous. He realized how this feeling had expressed itself, involuntarily.

> "O sweet earth-love! I then would lose the bliss
> Of many heavens for a single kiss."

He determined that he would, through sheer power of will, bring himself back to the attitude of the first lines. Yes, he did worship Biatritz: she was his saint. He resolved to be satisfied with this, and to strangle his new-born passion at its very birth. Had he been a rich noble, he might dream of winning her, but for even the most famous troubadour there was

no hope. He might as well be a lackey in the stable, as heir to the poor fief of Vacqueiras. What could he offer the daughter of the Count of Monferrat? What could he expect from the most beautiful woman in the world? He knew well that she was destined for marriage with Guilhem: she must make alliance with a powerful family who could assist the Monferrata in their policy. Was it not possible for him to love Biatritz as Arnaut loved Alazais: to be contented with a word, a glance, a smile? He fell on his knees in the cool shadow of the night, and prayed that God might help him to master this strong love with which he wrestled.

Hour after hour he struggled, but when he rose at midnight, he knew that nevermore could he look upon Biatritz with the calm devotion of a troubadour. He climbed the staircase to Bonifaz' room and found his friend seated at a table with a travel-soiled letter from his father before him. Raimbaut began almost rudely, —

" It is my duty, by our oath of comradeship, to tell you plainly of something very near my heart. Will you listen? "

" It is no less my duty to hearken than for you to speak."

" Only last night did I give my pledge in no wise to hinder this suit of my Lord of Courthézon. That pledge I cannot keep. There has sprung up in my heart a feeling for your sister which is no less devotion, though I love her as a man loves who is neither

troubadour nor varlet. Had I the right of gentler birth, I would demand her for my wife, and face death to win her. I dread to see her lest I speak plainly. I dare not meet Guilhem, for fear I should throttle him with these bare fingers, lacking a weapon. So fierce is my jealousy that I can do naught else in honor towards you, my comrade, than to tell the truth, and bid you farewell."

Placing his hands on his friend's shoulder, Bonifaz looked into the eyes that were so full of pain.

"Alas! I feared it would come to this! I have not been blind. Were you the Count of Courthézon, I would give you Biatritz gladly. I believe you could make her happy as could no other man who walks the earth. My heart is sore that I must agree with you that it is impossible. Though I have the right to bestow my sister upon whom I will, yet I must consider the future of an ancient family. Perhaps absence will help and you may in conscience return to us again. Wherever you wander, you will always have my friendship."

"Bonifaz, you have shown your love for me in a thousand ways! One favor only I ask of you. Give me some commission which will excuse my sudden departure. I must away before the first light of the sun shows in the east."

"I have here," said Bonifaz, turning to the table and taking from it a folded piece of parchment, "an important message to Count Raimon of Toulouse. You shall bear it for me. Our old master has at last

been moved to come to the assistance of the Crusade on a scale befitting his wealth and traditions. If you will linger a little while in Toulouse, I will join you there. I must follow this letter in person as soon as I arrange my affairs."

Raimbaut took the missive and said farewell, not trusting himself to express his gratitude.

"May all angels guard and keep you!" said Bonifaz, as his friend disappeared through the doorway.

Through the long night-watches Raimbaut paced the floor of his room, and with the first light of dawn made ready for his departure. Yet Jacques was wholly unprepared for such a summons, and the sun had risen when Raimbaut mounted his horse. In another moment he would have ridden over the drawbridge, but a little page came running up to him.

"The Lady Biatritz wishes to see you in the garden," he said.

Raimbaut dismounted and walked across the courtyard, resolved that he would control himself, though the very thought of seeing Biatritz sent fire through his veins.

The breath of autumn had changed the leaves to russet, gold, and red. The rising sun gave a touch of glory to the smiling valley. So clear was the air that every line of Monte Rosa was visible, from the dark green forests at its base to the white splendor of its lofty head. The nearness of the mountain seemed to Biatritz an omen of good things, though all around

her were signs of the dying summer. There were no roses on the vine that latticed her arbor, but in the garden a few late flowers bloomed, and the paths were strewn with fading petals.

As she sat with her hands folded in her lap, there came to her a premonition so strong and sweet that every nerve tingled as she waited. She realized that an hour had come for which she found herself strangely unprepared. She heard the sound of the opening gate and the crunch of quick footsteps on the path. Her white fingers sought the cross at her breast. So Raimbaut found her, pale and silent, with the long lashes resting on her cheek. The love in his heart surged like a great wave; he could not speak. Biatritz also was at a loss, but controlled herself with an effort and said, —

" Messire Raimbaut, I wish it were possible for you to unsay the words you spoke to me. Unhappily, they are like arrows, which cannot be called back after they have left the bow. With the parchment it is different. The first lines are very beautiful, and these I will keep; the last were surely written with the thought of some one else? They are such as no troubadour should speak to his Lady of Song. It has grieved me to injure the work of your pen, yet have I severed the manuscript: the octave I will treasure, but the sestet I must return."

She handed the piece of parchment to Raimbaut. He crushed it in his palm.

" You speak no more than truth. I have forfeited

the right to be called your troubadour. Absolve me from my allegiance, and bid me go. No longer am I content to sing your praise alone. I must be more or less to you."

His eyes were bright, his mouth firm. Biatritz started back with wonder and was about to speak, but he would not pause.

"I am weary of being treated like a lute or a viol which can only make sweet melodies. Yet am I crazed to say this, for your gentleness has filled my soul with bliss. All my life have I sought the Perfect Love, as holier souls have quested for the Grail. When a little lad at Vacqueiras, I donned a severed mantle. A long time kept I my pledge inviolate, but in the end I fell. Do you know what led me to renew the vow I had belied?"

"I do not know."

"Into your eyes I looked. By their pure light I saw my own unworthiness. Hand in hand I walked with you to the very gates of Heaven, until the demon of jealousy spread his dark wings and hid from me the celestial light. My love for you is only less holy than my adoration of Our Lady. If we were peasants on the hillside, I might speak plainly. I should tell you of a vineyard by the southern sea, where I had built a cottage over which the roses crept. I should beg you to go with me to the village priest that he might make us man and wife. I should plead with you until your kind heart could not deny me. But we are not peasants. You are a daughter of

Monferrat. I am a poor troubadour. So I have come but to say farewell. Is it madness to ask that you give me a single word of hope to bless the weary days?"

He knelt at her feet and pressed his lips to her slender fingers. Biatritz drew not her hand away. But she shook her head and looked into his face with a great sadness in her eyes. Her voice was very tender.

"I, too, have fought a battle with my heart. When you spoke to me last night, for a little while I dreamed of happiness like any peasant girl. Truly I think I differ no whit from her, but for the samite, the jewels, and the shackles of an ancient name. I dreamed I was married to the man I loved. But I woke at last. I remembered that the joy of life could not be mine."

"Tell me, you do not love Messire Guilhem?" demanded Raimbaut, eagerly.

"I do not love him."

"Tell me," he cried, springing to his feet, "were I the Count of Courthézon, could I hope to win you?"

He listened, breathless, as she said, —

"Do you remember how I showed you the secret of the garden gate, and brought you to my Arbor of Dreams on that sweet Easter Sunday? It was then, although I knew it not, that I unbarred my heart. Through all the weeks that followed I saw not whither I was drifting. Only yesterday did I begin to understand. To-day there is nothing in my soul but certainty."

" Come with me! " cried Raimbaut. " I will build for you a tower by the southern sea."

Biatritz shook her head sadly, tenderly as before. " I cannot go with you; yet will I pray the saints to bring you back to me. You may trust my love even as you believe in God."

She rose to her feet, no longer the pale white lily of Easter day, for her face was suffused with blushes. Raimbaut drew her to his breast, whispering words of love and adoration. He kissed her forehead and her cheeks. Lured by their fragrance, he sought her lips, but she repulsed him gently. — "At this moment, my beloved, I would deny you nothing. Yet I must save my lips for the man I wed. Should I gain the consent of Bonifaz to our marriage, I will not wait, but will go to you. The kiss that I refuse to-day shall be the sign of joy, the pledge of our betrothal." She unclasped the arms which clung so closely about his neck. One last glance she gave him full of unutterable love, then, throwing herself on the green sward, she listened to the slow footsteps and the sound of the closing gate.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE BLACK SAIL

RAIMBAUT and Jacques rode away from the Castle of the Vale even more silently than they had approached it from Valenza six months before. Jacques, after one or two abortive efforts to engage his master in conversation, left him to his thoughts. They were very bitter and very sweet. Each step took him away from Biatritz, yet the consciousness that she loved him filled his cup of happiness to the brim. What though the future was shrouded in the mist of uncertainty; what though he had won but the promise that she would wait for him,— the sun of hope shone through it all, glorifying even the sorrow of separation. It was of a love like this that he had dreamed at Vacqueiras, though he did not comprehend its depth or sweetness. It was a vision like this which had appeared to him again and again. Surely she had kept his feet from wandering far from the true path, and had prevented him from ever quite forgetting the severed mantle which he wore. He remembered how impressed he had been when Bonifaz showed him her picture on that first morning at Toulouse. The thought of that had given him strength to resist the beautiful Bellisenda. It was the unconscious comparison between her and Loba which had left in him a saving discontent. It was a joy to

remember how he had been permitted to draw his sword in her defence and protect her from danger. He recalled her every act and word as they sat together in the Arbor of Dreams. He pictured her fair face, so serious and so serene. Her smile came back to him like a benediction. Truly the saints had been good to give him a lady so beautiful and a love so blessed! Possessed by these memories, Raimbaut rode league after league in silence. Scarce a word did he speak until they came to the gates of Genoa, where they met a motley crowd jostling one another in selfish haste.

As they clattered through the city, they found the streets empty and deserted. They could scarcely have been more vacant had a plague swept through them. No sooner, however, did Raimbaut get an uninterrupted view of the harbor, than he saw where the people were gathered, for the quays were black with thronging multitudes. Even the ships were crowded, and the sailors had swarmed into the rigging.

At first he could not make out what had drawn the populace to the water's edge, but suddenly discovered a ship with sails black as funeral plumes. The huge vessel was creeping slowly up the outer harbor, for the breeze scarce filled her gloomy canvas. She moved as if laden with the burden of death. A strange spirit of horror seemed to brood over all, and no one turned to speak to Raimbaut as he passed. He made his way to the warehouse of a merchant through whom he was wont to receive messages from

Vacqueiras, and found him standing in his doorway surrounded by his clerks and a little group of seamen. There were also gathered on the quay a number of knights and nobles, all grave and silent. Raimbaut returned the salutation of the merchant, and, pointing to the harbor, asked,—

"What means the entrance of this ship with the black sails?"

"I cannot answer," replied the merchant, "although I believe it to be a vessel of mine which sailed not long ago from Acre. I fear she brings ill tidings from Palestine."

"I think you are right," Raimbaut rejoined. "We had news at Monferrat, only a fortnight past, that the army was in a weakened state, and invited disaster."

No one showed any inclination to talk above a whisper, and there was a wait of many minutes while the sombre craft came in. The sun, just at setting, broke through the clouds and transformed the black canvas to a sickly red, more ghastly than before. The last ray had departed, and dusk was beginning to gather as the sails dropped to the deck with a sound like the rattle in the throat of a dying man. The ship swung slowly along the quay where Raimbaut stood.

As they were making the vessel fast, a tall knight stepped ashore. His armor was painted black, his face was pale and set. He walked with difficulty, having received some serious hurt, and leaned upon the

shoulder of a younger man, followed by a score of lesser knights and squires.

" It is a noble of Verona, a Knight Templar, who is high in the confidence of his Order," whispered the merchant. Then he bowed respectfully as the knight addressed him.

" Alas, my good Guido, I bring the direst news that ever blackened mortal lips. We have been overwhelmed by the host of the Saracens. The Holy City is fallen. Our King is a prisoner. The Cross is the spoil of the infidel."

At this a cry of horror went up, and, as the word passed through the multitude, there arose, in a long wave, murmurs and groans of dismay. An old man-at-arms advanced, and, bowing humbly, said, —

" I pray you tell me, Sir, how the disaster came to us. I too have fought under the banner of the Cross. Yet did I never think that news so bitter should be brought to me."

" Bitter, indeed," the knight replied; " and worst of all, it was ill counsel, after good, that caused our defeat. We were mustered at the Fountain of Sepphoris, between Acre and the Sea of Galilee. Here came to us a message from the Countess of Tripoli that she was besieged at Tiberias, and in such straits that she could hold out but little longer. A council was assembled, and Raymond advised that Tiberias be left to its fate, for to attempt its rescue just then would bring certain destruction. ' If I lose my wife, my retainers, my city, I will get these

back when I can. I had rather sacrifice all than see this land the spoil of the unbeliever!' This was a wise decision. But Gerard de Rideford, who had obtained great influence over the King, came to him at midnight, and, in spite of protests, persuaded him to move at dawn. All day long we were hemmed in by the Saracens, and, unable either to advance or retreat, were forced to camp. The next morning we rose, faint with heat, almost dead with thirst, possessed by premonition of defeat. I have never before seen so many brave men go with doubtful hearts into battle. When it came to the fight, however, courage returned; and we did our best. There were many deeds of daring, and again and again we drove back our assailants; yet, when the stars came out, they looked upon us completely routed. Though badly wounded, I could not rebel against the command of Guy himself, to carry the news to Acre. I seized a swift camel, the owner of which had been slain, and, riding without stop, reached port and set sail at once. The battle of Tiberias has broken the Army of the Cross. Only a handful escaped to the shelter of the walls of Jerusalem, which they vainly tried to defend. Even now, the Holy City is in the hands of the infidel."

When the knight ended, there was a great silence, broken by stifled sobs. A shrill cry went up from the people, rising higher and higher until it became a wail of agony. Some broke into tears; others cursed Saladin; many threw themselves on the ground and

tore their garments in their sorrow and despair. The tall knight was lifted upon a horse, which he mounted with difficulty, and rode slowly up the street toward the citadel.

So overwhelmed was Raimbaut that for the moment he quite forgot his errand. He had all his life been strangely indifferent to the Call of the Cross. He knew that brave men were suffering and dying on the hot sands of Syria, but they seemed misguided zealots. To-day the approach of the ship with the black sails, the sight of the knight pale and wounded, and his story of disaster, took possession of the singer's very soul. It brought all the chivalry of the Crusaders strangely near to him: the struggle to rescue the Holy City seemed real and intimate. For the time he forgot even his love and the sorrow of separation. He was about to cry out as from a dream, when Guido touched him on the shoulder.

"Here is a message, Messire Raimbaut, newly arrived for you. I should have sent it to Milan, had you not come here to-day."

Raimbaut took the parchment, opened it mechanically, and read it with little comprehension of its meaning. Then he came to himself, and examined each word keenly and feverishly. The message was from Anselme.

"This is to tell you that Berguedan the Spaniard is at Courthézon. I am burdened by fears which I cannot express. Come to Vacqueiras at once! May Saint Martin bring you quickly!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

DEATH THE MEDDLER

At the news that Berguedan was at Courthézon, Raimbaut shot like an arrow out of Genoa. The resentment which had slumbered during his stay at the Castle of the Vale, now became a veritable passion.

Jacques had never seen his master so possessed. He rode night and day, exchanging each worn-out beast for a fresh one, and on the sixth day reached Carpentras, where he learned that Berguedan had slept that very week. This so inflamed Raimbaut's anger that, although he had completed a full day's journey, he stopped only to give the horses an hour's rest, and then saddled, being determined to spend the night at Vacqueiras. At the village it would be easy to obtain complete information concerning affairs at Courthézon; from the brown tower it would be possible to watch and be prepared to strike. He had slight fear of recognition, as no one had set eyes on him since he left home, a boy of sixteen.

As he spurred along toward Vacqueiras, he was possessed by an ever-present foreboding. He was as weary both in mind and body as if he had lain on the rack. Every step of the way he was occupied with memories of that evening so long ago when with Anselme he had waited in the tower for Peirol's return.

The wide Rhone valley was flooded with sunbeams; the air was soft and balmy as the shadows lengthened. At last, the light went out like a smothered torch. Raimbaut saw the tide of night spread over the plain, climb the rocks behind Vacqueiras, and cover the high summit of Ventoux with its dark wave.

It was with an inexplicable presentiment of evil that he neared the spot where the road from Carpentras crossed that from Courthézon. He had never passed without a shudder this place where Peirol had received his hurt; but to-night he felt he could scarce force himself to approach it. Indeed, he was so thoroughly exhausted and unnerved that the temptation came to him to turn and ride back to Carpentras.

There were no sounds but those from the marshes by the river. The gloom was bridging the gaps between the hedges, and the stars were beginning to show dimly.

They were within a short distance of the cross-roads when Raimbaut suddenly drew rein.

" Tell me, Jacques, do you see a horse's head above the hedgerow? "

" I see it plainly."

" Is it a red roan? "

" No," answered Jacques, looking at his master wonderingly, for he had never seen him in such a mood. " It is a chestnut horse with a white star on his forehead, and a little behind I can see the back of a gray charger."

Raimbaut drew a long breath and said, —

"It is passing strange to see two horses loose in a lonely place like this."

With ever deepening forebodings he approached the cross-roads. When he reached the open space, there stood a big gray contentedly cropping the grass, and a handsome brown destrier, bravely caparisoned, making a melancholy figure in the middle of the road.

It was Jacques who discovered a huge form stretched on the grass. There was no sound or motion, and the head was hidden in the black shadow of the hawthorn hedge. Raimbaut slipped from his horse and, drawing near the still figure, peered into the pale face. Then he gave a cry of horror, for it was none other than Peirol. He seized the bare hand and pressed it to his lips. It was cold and rigid. He drew off his gauntlet, fumbled with trembling fingers at the collar of his father's tunic, and held a hand to his heart. There was no motion. The eyes were closed, the look quite calm and peaceful.

Raimbaut realized that Peirol was indeed dead. He sprang to his feet, and drew his sword with a fierce cry. At this the brown destrier gave a snort and, lurching forward, galloped madly away toward Courthézon, as if pursued by winged fear. Raimbaut could see nothing but the gray horse, until the latter, which was still grazing, took a step forward. Then he discovered, on the other side of the road close to the river, a little huddled group of men standing dim and ghost-like in the dusk. He called

Jacques to him, and they crossed the road with their swords ready in their hands.

They came first upon two rough peasants, who turned with frightened eyes, and edged away at Raimbaut's approach. They next saw the tall form of Anselme standing with bowed head by the roadside, his white hair showing ghastly against the hedge. The priest turned and lifted his hand in greeting, but Raimbaut brushed by him, and stooped over a recumbent figure, half-lying, half-sitting by a green bank. It was Berguedan, who looked up with a mocking smile. Raimbaut's anger broke bounds, and he would have struck the Spaniard full in the face, had not Anselme caught his wrist.

"Beware, my son, lest you assail a dying man, who has received the last sacraments of the Church."

At this Raimbaut staggered back, and Berguedan broke into a peal of hysterical laughter which ended in a sob and groan.

"Ah, my friend of the severed mantle, at last you have caught me; but you come too late. You cannot cross swords with one already doomed to die. It is Death the meddler who has come between us."

He broke into the same wild laughter as before, and Raimbaut found no word to answer. He seemed to be passing through some dreadful dream, out of which he must soon wake with a sigh of relief.

Anselme bent down and spoke again, —

"It has eased your soul to confess your sins.

Now ask forgiveness from him whom you have wronged."

"Good priest," replied Berguedan, "the scales hang not so even that anything I can say to Messire Raimbaut will change the eternal balance. To you I have laid bare my life. I have asked that he be told of all that in the least concerns him. As you well know, my sin against him is less than nothing compared with others that have lain heavy on my soul. Even now I can hear the wings of Death. Pray that he — may — come — quickly!"

The Spaniard fell back with a deep groan; there was a rattle in his throat; and in another moment he was gone. Anselme whispered a prayer for the passing spirit, and closed the lids over the glazing eyes. He turned to Raimbaut and said, —

"Thanks to the good God, I arrived in time to give ghostly comfort and the last rites of the Church to two dying men. The first had little on his soul, but the other will test the mercy of Heaven."

"What led to this encounter?" demanded Raimbaut. "How was it that my father was allowed to leave the castle, and to engage in this unhappy struggle at arms?"

"I have much to tell you," replied Anselme, "but we must first arrange for the proper care of the dead. Shall we go on to Vacqueiras, leaving Jacques here with the peasants? We can send down two litters from the village."

"I will go with you; yet I would not have the

body of Berguedan brought to Vacqueiras. It must be taken to Courthézon, where the Spaniard was a guest."

Once more Raimbaut looked into the face of Peirol, and then, mounting his horse, rode off with Anselme, who climbed with difficulty on to the back of the gray charger. As they went slowly through the darkness, Anselme answered the questions that were in Raimbaut's mind, although he was too overcome by his experience to ask them.

"You must know that for a full year my lord Peirol has been improving. We have sent messages as fast as we heard from you in Italy, but unfortunately could not reach you. For the last six months he has taken charge of his affairs, and has occasionally mounted this old gray and ridden over the valley. He lost something of his grossness, but he cared not to see strangers, and went out only at the approach of dusk.

"A week ago he suddenly rushed down the stairway in the middle of the afternoon, ordered his horse to be saddled, and galloped at full speed down the hill. His face was black with anger, yet he seemed quite master of himself. I had no clue as to what excited him, for, when he returned, he shook his head and would tell me nothing. The next day he ordered his armor, rusty from years of disuse, to be taken from the wall and polished until it shone like silver. Then, donning hauberk and helmet, he rode all day about the country, reaching home only with the

darkness. Color came back to his cheek and light to his eye. He was his old jovial self again and bandied words with Michonne as he had not done since he received his hurt. During the evenings he talked freely, and told me many things of which I had an inkling, but no certain knowledge. However, when I tried to draw from him some explanation of his sudden taking up of arms again, he put me off and would give only an evasive answer.

"To-day he was sitting at the window of the tower when he sprang to his feet and bade me help him arm. He mounted his horse and rode away. When he departed, I returned to the embrasure, and saw a knight on a chestnut destrier coming swiftly along the road from Courthézon. It was easy to watch Peirol's gray charger, and I could see the two riders meet at the cross-roads. For a moment they faced each other as if engaged in some parley. Suddenly swords were drawn, and I could see blades flash in the sun. For a while the issue was doubtful; then Peirol's strength prevailed. His opponent was half-beaten from his horse and had turned to fly, when Peirol seized him in his arms and they fell together. Then I could see nothing. Hurrying down the stairs, I summoned two peasants and we ran as fast as possible to the cross-roads. It was just at set of sun when we arrived. The struggle was over. The combatants were locked together by the roadside, each with dagger in hand, but too weak to strike another blow.

"When we dragged Peirol from his enemy, he stood for a moment on his feet and whispered, — 'Though I die, this devil can nevermore work harm!' He then fell backward into my arms. We carried him to the farther side of the road. He was able to give me his final instructions and to confess and receive absolution. His last words, Raimbaut, were those of advice and love to you."

As Anselme finished, they reached the little hill at Vacqueiras. A moment later they rode through the gate, and Raimbaut entered the doorway of the brown tower.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN OLD LOVE STORY

THE last solemn rites were performed for the lord of Vacqueiras. The villagers dug his deep grave under the floor of the little church, and on a stone slab were roughly cut his name and an *Orate*.

It was the night after poor Peirol's body had been placed at rest. Raimbaut sat with Anselme in the hall of the castle. For a long time there was silence, the chaplain studying his companion with kindly, searching eyes. At last he began, speaking carefully and hesitatingly, —

"My son, I have many things to say. Only now have I been able to straighten out the tangled threads of your life. Shall I tell you a story as I used when you were a tiny lad and stood at my knee? Are you strong enough to bear a revelation that will unsettle all your beliefs? Will you be patient to the end?"

"I will be patient," replied Raimbaut. "I believe that I am strong."

There was a dying fire on the hearth. All the time that Anselme talked, Raimbaut rarely lifted his eyes from the red embers, and not once did he open his mouth to ask a question. The priest began his tale as if it were one in which neither of them had any personal interest.

"Once there lived a fair demoiselle in a castle

perched on a crag overlooking the Rhone. She was tall and pale and full of dreams. She read old romances, and wrought skilfully at her tapestries, but most of all she loved to sing the ancient songs of Provence. Sometimes, as she sat looking out over the river to the ragged cliffs that formed the western horizon, she found new words of her own which she would sing and then pen carefully on parchment, that she might not forget them. She was a little lonely withal, for the old baron, her father, was far away in Palestine, and her mother was dead.

"One day there came gliding up the river a boat bravely furnished, and rowed by six sturdy oarsmen with swords and hauberks under their thwarts. In the stern sat a young knight with his squire; and the gallant, catching sight of the beautiful face in the embrasure, blew a kiss from the tips of his fingers as he swept slowly by. All day the memory of the dark eyes haunted him, and at dusk he returned and sang from the waters under her window a pretty little chanson in praise of the demoiselle.

"On the first night there was no response; on the second a white hand waved from the embrasure; and on the third a note came floating down into the boat, on which were written a few rhymed lines in answer to the serenade. How they met, I cannot tell, for the lady was strictly watched and guarded. The gallant was experienced in such adventures; he succeeded in gaining access to the demoiselle and carried her heart by storm. How could he fail? He was

handsome and debonair. He had wooed many fair ladies, had travelled much, and above all, was a famous troubadour whose songs were sung in every castle of Provence.

"Yet in spite of the desire which completely possessed her, she would not surrender to her lover's importunities, but insisted that their love must first receive the sanction of the Church. Indeed, religion is the only sure bulwark of a virtuous heart against the storm of passion. Again and again he assailed her; but she was firm in her refusal. God knows she loved him; but in her heart there was a purity which made her strong.

"The young Count was greatly disappointed, for he had no intention of marriage. Finding himself unable to persuade the demoiselle, he resolved to overcome her prejudice by means of a mock ceremony performed by one in the garb of a priest. He called his squire to him, and gave careful instructions as to what should be done. This squire had been always ready to perform his master's will, and to give him unquestioning obedience. Yet Providence, and the beauty and virtue of the demoiselle herself, wrought so strongly upon him, that he did not have the heart to carry out his master's wicked purpose.

"Now I must tell you that there stood, not far away, a poor church on the edge of a ragged village. Its priest was a young man who had the fear of God in his heart. To him the squire told his story, and it was arranged that the evil purpose of the gallant

should be thwarted. So the lovers were securely wedded by the sacred ceremonial of the Church, performed by a priest with full powers, the gallant believing the rite to be worthless and binding upon neither. In such ways doth God put to naught the devices of the wicked and protect the lambs of His fold.

" Now this careless gallant was one to whom consummation acts as water to the fire of love. He soon began to tire of his bride, and left her with protestations of the deepest devotion, on the plea that before he took her home to his own castle, he must break the news of their marriage to his mother. He promised to return without delay.

" Day after day the poor lady watched the curve of the river from her window. She grew pale and anxious as the months went by, and then, inspired by her longings, she wrote that perfect chanson, ' Why comes the dawn so soon? ' and sent it to her lover. So beautiful was it that the passion of the Count revived for a little, and she received in an answering song the assurance that he would soon return to claim her. The flame of love in his heart nevertheless flickered and died. To her beseeching messages he replied not at all, until, wearied by her entreaties, he wrote what he believed to be the truth: telling her plainly that there had been no marriage, and that she must keep silence. She, half-crazed by her trouble, had gone for advice to the Abbess of a nunnery not far away. On receiving there the dreadful final

message, she fell in a swoon, and for many weeks hovered between life and death. At this time she bore a man-child, who was given into the hands of a woman in the village, newly widowed, who had lost her own babe. It was the young priest who arranged for the care of the child, and who soon after took his departure for Rome.

"Although the demoiselle prayed fervently for death, the petition was denied her, and she returned to the castle on the river. Here she learned that her father had been slain by the enemies of Christ in far-off Palestine. A marriage had long before been planned between the demoiselle and the son of her over-lord. As she was now left quite unprotected, it was decided that the ceremony must take place at once. She succeeded in postponing the day, but at last, to end the young Count's importunities, she told him her whole sad story. To her surprise she discovered that his love was so great that naught could frustrate it, and as he still desired her, she could not deny herself the shelter of his name. In this she acted innocently and she quickly learned to love him. Another son was born to her and life was full of happiness and content.

"For five years the young priest dwelt under the shadow of the Apostles' tomb. When at last he returned to the village, he learned that soon after his departure the squire who had helped to thwart the wicked purpose of his master had reappeared. This squire had won his spurs, and been given a fief

of which he was about to take possession. So pleased was he with the little babe that he chose to call him his own son, and took him to his castle with the peasant foster-mother. The young priest was joyful enough when he heard about the child, but his soul was filled with horror when he learned of the marriage of the good lady to the son of her over-lord. He knew it was an unhallowed union; yet for a long time he was uncertain concerning his duty. At last he decided he had no choice but to tell everything to the woman who had been so deeply wronged, leaving to her conscience the decision.

"When she learned that her first marriage was lawful, that in the eyes of the Church she was the wife of her first lover alone, and that her child by the second was illegitimate, then came the supreme test of her religion. She chose, by the grace of God, the right path, and told her husband the whole truth. He, a true Christian, was yet filled with dismay at the thought of giving her up. At last it was decided, for the sake of the child that had been born to them, that they should continue together — before the world — as lord and lady, keeping the secret buried in their own breasts."

Here Anselme came to a pause, looking earnestly at Raimbaut, who now for the first time lifted his eyes from the fire, and then went on, —

"God knows I am telling the truth when I say that the lady was the noble Countess of Dia; and her false lover, yet lawful husband, Count Raimbaut of Cour-

thézon. The young squire who became a knight was Peirol; I am the priest; and that child is none other than Raimbaut of Vacqueiras."

Raimbaut's soul was too full of conflicting emotions for him to find words. When Anselme began again, his voice sounded strangely faint and distant.

"Although you were undoubtedly the legitimate son of the Count of Courthézon and heir to his title, it was decided to leave you in the charge of Peirol, and I was sent to minister to the little church of Vacqueiras.

" It was not long after this that the wicked Berguedan came into your life. How the wily Spaniard discovered the secret, I cannot tell; but he was clever enough to understand its value, and unscrupulous enough to take full advantage of it. He went first to the Count of Dia, and from him obtained a large sum of money, and the promise of yearly payments so long as the secret remained inviolate. Then, planning a double blackmail, he told his story to Tyburge; and she, fearing for her son, who had been chosen her brother's heir, purchased for herself the Spaniard's silence. It was at this time that there was a great tournament and Peirol came to Courthézon. Berguedan soon discovered that Peirol was dangerous to him, not alone because of his knowledge of the secret, but because he was pleasing in the eyes of Tyburge, whose favor the Spaniard also sought.

" It was a custom of Berguedan, always in danger because of his wicked deeds, to arrange a sure escape from any punishment which might come upon him.

For this reason he had secreted on a little farm towards Carpentras, a red roan horse of wondrous speed. No sooner had Peirol trotted slowly out of Courthézon after the jousts, than Berguedan hurried to the farm, and, mounting the swift destrier, galloped at full speed to the cross-roads. Here he greeted Peirol with friendly words, and struck him the murderous blow, as, with no thought of danger, he was looking eagerly toward the castle. The Spaniard was preparing to finish his wicked work with the dagger, when he heard the clatter of hoofs, and putting spurs to his horse escaped in the darkness. He succeeded in returning to the castle at Courthézon unseen by any one. Indeed, the tuft of red hair was the only clue to his guilt.

"For four years Berguedan wandered about enjoying his ill-gotten gains. He returned at last to Courthézon, and to crown his villainy told the Count the secret he had been twice paid to keep. In this he over-reached himself (which soon or late every wicked man must do), for the Count, instead of offering him a third bribe to secrecy, declared his firm intention to right the wrong of which he had been guilty in his youth. It was at this time he sent for you at Vacqueiras, fully resolved to make you his heir, in place of Guilhem. Berguedan decided he must act promptly. Assisted by Tyburge, he began at once to impregnate the Count's food with an insidious poison.

"When the Count was attacked again and again

by a mysterious and violent illness, he feared that death might claim him. So he wrote with his own hand a statement declaring you to be his son and rightful heir. He sealed it with his signet and placed it under the medallion of the Book of Hours. The Count died. You had fled on the same night, leaving Berguedan and Tyburge in apparent safety. For a long time they had no suspicion that the secret of your birth was in your own possession. They learned this at last from the chaplain of Courthézon in whom the Count had confided, and who was afraid to speak, until his mortal illness warned him to unbosom himself.

" At this Tyburge was in great consternation and resolved to kill you. It was with difficulty that she persuaded Berguedan to undertake this wicked deed, for the Spaniard had a strange liking for you. Yet it was at his instigation that Antoine shot at you in the forest, pushed the stone from the parapet, and poisoned the Apples of Love. You know, Raimbaut, how you escaped through the interposition of Heaven and the protection of Saint Martin. When you were wholly in Berguedan's power at the little castle, he hesitated to kill you, but left you to choose between perpetual imprisonment and the mercy of the jagged rocks.

" He reported your death to the Countess Tyburge, and told her that the Book of Hours could not be found, wishing still to keep this clue for future use. When you appeared at Le Puy, Tyburge was furious!

Berguedan was obliged to fly to Italy to escape her vengeance. He was living in Rome when he met Guilhem, who had come thither on a pilgrimage, and it did not take long for the wily Spaniard to ingratiate himself with the young Count. Through all his wanderings Berguedan carried the Book of Hours, and from his bosom he gave it me to-day as he lay dying at the cross-roads."

When Anselme finished, he handed the book to Raimbaut. The latter took it, and still without a word climbed the stairs to his room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CALL OF THE CROSS

THE shock of the revelation left Raimbaut stunned and purposeless. For a long time he was unable to adjust himself to the new point of view in which his whole life was placed. He had lavished upon Peirol all the love possible for a child to give his father, and he could not transfer even the memory of that affection to the careless Count of Courthézon. For his dead mother, he felt a great love and a great pity. She was beautiful; she was good; she had suffered for the sins of others. All the chivalry of his heart went out to her. As a boy, he had always felt the lack of maternal sympathy, and had envied every peasant child who rested on his mother's bosom. His whole life had been lonely.

To-night, though he knew that he never could feel the touch of her hand or the warmth of her kiss on his brow, yet there came to him a happiness wonderfully strange and sweet. He was conscious of a spirit of love in the very air about him. It was only when he realized that he should never hear the sound of her voice, that a sense of bereavement seemed like to break his heart. In spite of his manhood, his experience, and the fulness of his life, he was again a motherless child. Why had the joy of her presence been denied him? Now at last he understood himself: he

understood his impressions, dreams, and desires, as never before. It was not the life of Peirol, nor the shallow soul of the Count of Courthézon, but his own mother's spirit that had taken possession of him and had given him his love for the beautiful, his ideal of perfect womanhood.

Oh, if he might tell her of his adoration for Biatritz! She would know, and could advise him what to do. The thought of Biatritz drew him at last from his memories of the past. Even now Guilhem was by her side, free to speak when he would. Strangely enough, though his heart was aflame with jealousy, he did not fear that she would learn to love Guilhem. He was too superficial. Her serene soul could never be stirred by such light words as he might utter. Was it possible to persuade Bonifaz that Guilhem was an usurper? Would it be madness to go boldly to the Castle of the Vale and declare, —

"I am no longer a poor troubadour, dependent upon the bounty of my patrons, I am no longer heir to the humble fief of Vacqueiras. My rank is as high as your own. I have your word, that, were I the Count of Courthézon you would gladly give me your sister Biatritz. I claim its fulfilment, for I am the Count of Courthézon! I can prove my title, and will defend my rights with my own good sword."

He touched the secret spring in the cover of the Book of Hours, and the ivory placque lifted. He took the bit of parchment. He unfolded it with

trembling fingers. Penned by the Count's own hand, it bore his signature and seal. Raimbaut read as eagerly as if the script were to settle his entrance into Paradise: —

" In the fear of God, and by my hope of Heaven, I, Count Raimbaut of Courthézon, declare that I was wedded by the full rites of the Church to the Lady Philippa, afterwards Countess of Dia. She bore me a male child, at this present time known as Raimbaut of Vacqueiras: him I affirm to be heir to my title and possessions. I swear to the truth of the above by the Holy Rood, and call upon Anselme who wedded us, and Peirol, Lord of Vacqueiras, to witness the truth of my declaration."

In one corner of the document was appended the name of the priest of Courthézon.

Here was strong proof, yet it would be questioned by Guilhem, who would fight bitterly for the title. It was with a feeling of awe that Raimbaut opened the Book and turned the leaves until he came to the miniature of Saint Hope. He studied the sweet face reverently. How proud he was of the mother who occupied a place of honor such as no woman in Provence had ever attained! She had written its most beautiful lyric. There was none to compare with her save the Saint Love standing in the niche above her, towards whom she looked. It seemed again to Raimbaut as if it were Biatritz herself who stood before him: not a mere picture, not the likeness of one long since dead; but a woman alive, warm, fragrant. At

thought of her his heart grew wild with longing, and his soul was filled with rapture at the hope that he might soon hold her in his arms.

For a long time he gazed at the miniature in his hand, until he found his thoughts strangely wandering back to the ship with the black sails, laden with the story of disaster to the Cross. Almost as if a curtain had been drawn before the picture of his love, he saw instead the fearful battle on the rocky desert of Tiberias, the triumph of the Turk, the dreadful death of the soldiers of the Cross. That stricken field with the faces of the dead, pale in the moonlight, seemed nearer than the meadows of Vacqueiras. As he looked there came a cry, faint at first, but growing louder and clearer until his ears rang with the sound. It was the Call of the Cross, insistent, unearthly. The summons was from Heaven, — to him alone. He must answer it. For the first time in his life there seemed to be a real Christ who had suffered and died for him. Then the picture faded. He saw Biatritz with the love-light in her eyes. He heard her voice so low and tender. He felt her soft arms round his neck. But the " Call " came again, urgent, clamorous.

So through the long hours of the night he fought a drawn battle, until at dawn there came to his dull ears the sound of the bell in the little church. He descended the stairs. He entered and knelt among the rough peasants, who looked up at him wonderingly. He tried to pray, but could not.

Then sleepless nights followed days of conflict. There came at last a morning when Raimbaut rose from his knees and went to Anselme in the little sacristy. Here he found the good priest standing before the old cabinet, whose uncouth carving even Time could not soften.

" Peace be with you, my son," said Anselme.

" The peace of God cannot rest on me," replied Raimbaut, " for my soul is given over to a strife which is not yet ended. There has come to me the Call of the Cross. I cannot listen to it until I have won the woman whom I love more than all this world and all Heaven as well."

" If the Spirit of God be struggling with you," answered Anselme, "you will find no ease until you yield. Do you remember what I told you when a little lad, — a wise man gives not his heart to love or war or pleasure, but seeks for peace? All through the years I have never failed to pray for you. I still believe that God will win His own."

To this Raimbaut made no reply. The first sunbeams of the morning shone through the little window full upon his face, but they brought no light to his dull eyes or his troubled brow. When he spoke, his voice was very weary.

" Give me your blessing, for I must say farewell."

" Whither go you? " inquired Anselme.

" I shall ride to Count Raimon, for whom I have a message. He has always been my friend and loves not Guilhem. I hope to enlist him in my cause. I shall

tell my tale to Bonifaz and ask that Biatritz be given to me, the true Count of Courthézon."

He knelt for Anselme's benediction.

"May Saint Martin guide you in the right way! May God give you the peace that passeth understanding! May you find the Perfect Love!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE PERFECT LOVE

WHEN Raimbaut rode with Jacques out of the dark gateway of Vacqueiras, he was greeted by a smiling day. Over the hills and valleys of Provence the wind blew softly and the sun shone like a benediction. Among the olive groves and vineyards the peasants labored tranquilly. There was a glimpse of the gray mill; over its mossy wheel the white water was splashing. All around were familiar scenes and fields fragrant with memories, yet they won no single glance from Raimbaut. He looked neither to right nor to left as he rode steadily toward Avignon.

Long before they reached the city, they could hear the great bell of the cathedral tolling solemnly. Its notes floated over the bare meadows, and the air was laden with the burden of sorrow. At noon they found the fields vacant, and the villages silent but for the clatter of their hoofs over the echoing pavements. The day was no longer smiling. Out of the sea the mists had risen, and a storm was gathering over the sharp crags on the horizon. The sun was hidden by drifting clouds and the wind moaned wearily.

When Raimbaut first caught sight of Nostre-Dame-des-Doms he crossed himself and whispered a prayer. Like a strong man in defeat, the tall tower rose grim

and expressionless above the winding river. The Crescent had triumphed over the Cross. Jerusalem had fallen, and the horror of the disaster hung over Avignon like a black pall.

Entering the wide gate, Raimbaut found the streets almost deserted. Here and there could be seen the old and infirm, who were unable to climb the steep hill of Rocher-des-Doms, and the little children, too frightened to play, although they understood not the meaning of the calamity which had fallen upon them. A Requiem was being celebrated at the cathedral for the soldiers of the Cross who had given up their lives on the bleak plain of Tiberias, and up the winding roadway the weary horses plodded.

Dismounting at the portal, Raimbaut left his destrier with Jacques, and entered the gloomy building. The service was nearly over, the air heavy with incense, and the notes of the organ like the sighs of dying men. At Genoa there had been loud lamentations and cries of surprise and dismay. Here the first shock of consternation had given place to grief more intense. The floor was crowded with kneeling worshippers, many of whom had thrown themselves prone on the cold stones. Nearly all were motionless and silent, though the more excitable rocked to and fro. There were some who sobbed, and occasionally a deep moan expressed the agony of a burdened heart. Avignon, like every city in Provence, had sent its companies of knights and men-

at-arms over the blue water. Hardly one of the great throng but had lost some dear one, and all were filled with horror at the triumph of the infidel and the humiliation of the Cross.

For a moment Raimbaut looked about him, but saw nothing clearly. Close by his side, in the shadow of a pillar, were a knight and demoiselle. They started at his entrance and gazed at him with wonder. He brushed against them, but did not feel their touch. He buried his face in his hands and bowed his head as if a great weight had fallen upon his shoulders. The voices of the slain seemed to reproach him and cry for vengeance. He had been singing songs of love while brave men fought to the death with prayers on their parched lips. So overwhelmed was he that, when the service ended, he still knelt in the shadows, his face hidden in his hands. He noticed not the sound of shuffling feet, nor the shock of those who stumbled against him as they sought the door. It was only when there fell a great silence that he looked up and saw a tall form mount the pulpit.

It was Benizet. A torch shone full into his face, as radiant as when he bore upon his back the huge stone for the building of the bridge. He spoke as simply to the congregation as if they were masons working under him.

"Brothers, listen to me! My heart, like yours, is filled with woe at the dire message that has come to us. With you I have prayed for the souls of those who gave their lives for the cause of Christ. We

cannot bring the dead to life. We cannot forget our sorrow for the loved ones. But to my soul there comes the question: How shall we retrieve the disaster that has fallen upon us? Certes, we must win back the Holy City!"

For a moment he paused, that the words might sink into the hearts of his hearers; and then he spoke with a new note of hope and courage in his voice.

"Even in our dejection we must not forget that the cause of Our Lord Christ is never lost. The infidel cannot prevail over us. My work in Avignon is done: the great bridge spans the river from shore to shore. I now am free! Before you all I swear hereafter to devote myself to the sword. Who will take the Cross with me?"

There were loud cries. A few earnest men came forward, and a little knot gathered around the pulpit. Most of them belonged to the order of bridge-builders; a few were men-at-arms, and some were poor peasants.

At Raimbaut's side was a group of knights and ladies. The gloom of their faces did not lift at Benizet's exhortation. One old baron raised a maimed hand and cried out, —

"I have given two sons to the cause of Christ! I have lost one hand, the other I will keep for bowl and trencher."

"I would my husband had never gone upon the hopeless quest!" exclaimed a tall young chatelaine, whose face was wet with tears.

"Alas!" declared a pretty demoiselle, "my brother is dead, and his body lies unburied, food for the ravens. But thank God, you, Aimar, still live! I swear you shall not leave my side!"

As she spoke she caught her lover's arm and, clinging to him, looked up with a glance full of fear and entreaty.

The calamity was so fresh, so bewildering, that the appeal fell upon deaf ears. Benizet spoke a few words of encouragement to the men who had gathered about him, and there was a smile of confidence on his stern lips as he said, —

"Here is a little company of men-at-arms, masons skilful with the trowel, who can quickly learn to wield a sword, peasants whose muscles have been hardened by labor; yet I see no one to lead them; for I also must acquire the art of war. Is there no knight who will answer the Call of the Cross? Is there no troubadour who will inspire our hearts with song? It is but for a year and a day that I ask you to pledge yourselves. How small a share is that of the long life that God has measured out to us!"

Again Benizet waited, but there was no response to his entreaty. None came forward; instead, the crowd began to move slowly toward the door. As Raimbaut watched the drifting of the sullen tide, his soul was filled with a great enthusiasm, a boundless pity. In this wise was Christ deserted after Gethsemane, when "they all forsook him and fled." Raimbaut lifted his eyes to the Rood. The white

lips appealed to him irresistibly. All that was generous in his spirit cried out in loyalty. To his ears there came a sound like the rush of many waters. He felt a hot wind on his brow. It throbbed and pulsed like the beating of a great heart. Biatritz no longer held him back with clinging fingers; her white hand pointed to the Cross. Only the purity of her passion had made real his love of Christ. Only by sacrifice could his soul be fitted to mate with one so full of spiritual beauty. Only by renunciation could he reach Heaven. He must risk present joy for the glory of God.

"Biatritz, my Biatritz," he whispered, "I leave you as Galahad left the fair Blanchefleur, with the bride-roses in her lap. I kiss you farewell, remembering the fragrance of your lips. I give my fealty to Heaven, praying that earthly love, made pure by sacrifice, may not be denied me."

Though he breathed the words, the demoiselle, who knelt by his side, heard him. She was about to speak, but the knight restrained her with an outstretched hand.

Benizet's faith had been tested to the utmost. Every moment seemed more hopeless, when he heard a voice like the call of an archangel. The throng halted, spellbound. It was the Crusader's battle-cry which had risen from many a stricken field: —

"God wills it! God wills it!"

Following the words came Raimbaut. He pushed his way through the crowd to the foot of the pulpit.

His face was transfigured by an ecstasy of divine love. He raised his sword above his head, hilt uppermost, and cried, —

" Here is a poor knight and a halting singer, who takes the Cross for the glory of his Lord Christ and for the honor of his lady! "

A great hush had fallen on the multitude, so that the clear voice was audible in the far corners of the cathedral. For a moment only Raimbaut paused.

" I fear not to go alone, yet I would have at my elbow a company of the good men of Provence: men with swords in their hands, songs on their lips, and fair ladies praying for their victory and safe return. Remember, we are following the Lord Christ who suffered on the Cross for our sins! "

At this the multitude surged to and fro. Benizet exclaimed, —

" God be praised! Here is the comrade for whom I have prayed these many years! Here is a man both knight and troubadour! Who will follow Raimbaut of the Severed Mantle? "

Yet even now the barons held back. The old knight again raised his maimed arm and said, —

" When God helps not His own, His people will not fight for Him! "

A mocking gallant shouted, —

" Come, Messire Raimbaut, you have a lute in your left hand! We would rather hear you sing than preach to us! "

There were conflicting cries. The crowd tossed

THE CALL OF THE CROSS

like a sea troubled by divergent tides. Raimbaut dropped his sword, lifted his lute and sang, —

"The God of Heaven and earth, of sea and air,
Maker of wind and rain, of heat and cold,
Bids all who love Him their broad sails unfold,
And He will lead them whither once did fare
The Magi Kings. The Turks, by Satan guided,
Have seized Jerusalem, and He who o'er
The city wept, her crimes bewailing sore,
Now looks to us, with eager swords provided,
To fight for Him whom impious tongues blaspheme;
Each slave of sin his lost soul may redeem
When o'er his feet the Jordan wave has glided."

First one and then another began to thread his way forward. Here and there were heard voices in remonstrance, or in argument, as some enthusiast was restrained by those about him. Wives clung to their husbands and ladies to their lovers. In the shadow of the pillar the demoiselle lifted a face full of entreaty, but the knight sadly shook his head. Again Raimbaut sang, —

"For us Christ suffered, deigned for us to bear
The load of woe by no fond heart consoled;
Endured the taunt of Jews with hate made bold;
Was pointed at that scornful eyes might stare;
With cords was scourged, by mocking words derided;
Was raised on miry timbers, where He wore
A crown of thorns which His white forehead tore.
Whose is the heart for hardness would be chided!
War for the Cross great honor I esteem:
Death is all-glorious, might it but redeem
The land where He in life and death abided."

The story of the Sacred Passion had ever a strong appeal. But, told in song, it kindled a flame in every heart, for music was the soul-language of Provence. By twos and threes, barons and men-at-arms pushed forward. Again the demoiselle turned to the knight in silent supplication, and at last he nodded his consent. Yet they listened breathlessly as Raimbaut finished with a voice full of tender cadence, —

"Lord Christ! I pray I may not evermore
Mourn my lost love, because Thy Cross I bore!
'Twixt Thee and love I wavered undecided;
Rose of the world is she of whom I dream,
Yet in my soul Thou reignest now supreme;
Valor and joy to Thee I have confided."

At this refrain even the most obdurate yielded. The vast multitude suddenly surged forward, clamoring to join the Crusade. There was a forest of blades lifted heavenward. Few held back who were able to wield a sword or level a lance.

Benizet's face was wet with tears. He descended from the pulpit. With trembling fingers he fastened the sacred emblem. Then a mighty cry echoed through the cathedral arches, as Raimbaut stood before them, the red Cross on his breast.

At this moment of triumph, out of the gloom came Biatritz. She had cast aside her mantle, and was clad in a white robe. So like a saint was she that the crowd, filled with wonder, made way for her. Down the narrow lane between the awestruck wor-

shippers she walked like one in a dream. Her lovely lashes rested on her cheek, and not until she reached the pulpit steps did she reveal the glory of her eyes. So radiant were they that Raimbaut could not read their message until she drew his face to hers and kissed him on the lips. Scarce able to believe his senses, Raimbaut turned to Bonifaz, who grasped his hand and said, —

"Truly it is the pledge of your betrothal."

Then Raimbaut understood. He looked out over a sea of smiling countenances, and his voice was vibrant with the rapture that filled his soul, —

"Listen! all you of Provence who live for love and song. To-day I know that he who worships Christ alone must miss the joy of life. He who adores his lady only must lose the bliss of Heaven. With the cross on my breast and the kiss upon my lips I have learned at last the lesson of the severed mantle. I have found the Perfect Love."

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